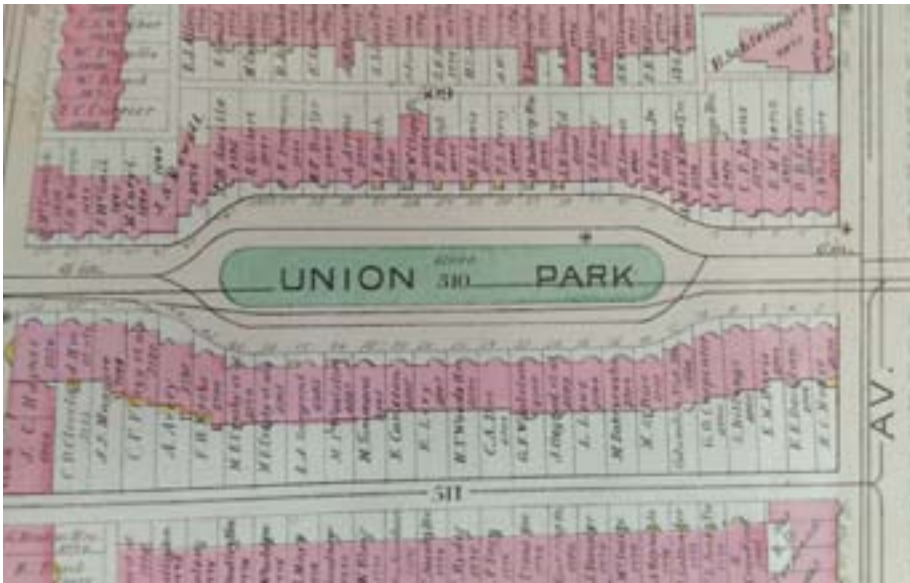


The South End Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2015



An 1870 Map of Union Park from the SEHS Collections

Finding the Hidden History in your Home

by Kate Hathaway Weeks

Most people are curious about the history around their homes. It's why many of us have spent hours watching *This Old House* and have been fascinated by the distinct story each home has to tell. In addition to the actual structure of your home, learning more about your neighborhood can literally make you feel like you are walking on storied ground. Here in New England, whether you live in the city or country, it's likely that you are brushing up against great moments in history or retracing the steps of a famous literary figure on a regular basis.

In addition to the actual structure of your home, learning more about your neighborhood can literally make you feel like you are walking on storied ground.

settling into the area with my family, I joined the South End Historical Society to find out more about my beloved neighborhood, its storied residents, and fountained squares. Stacen Goldman, the Executive Director of the South End Historical Society shared some of her favorite resources for being your own

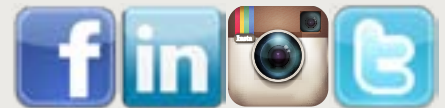
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Check our website

www.southendhistoricalsociety.org
for upcoming programs, events, and walking tours

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THE SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY
49th Annual Meeting
June 11th, 2015 - 6:30 PM


Agenda

- Presiding: Michael Leabman, President
- Annual Report: Michael Leabman
- Treasurer's Report: Maryellen Hassall
- Nominating Committee Report: Maryellen Hassall
- Election of SEHS Officers and Directors
- only current SEHS Members can vote for officers and directors
- Keynote Speaker

Keynote
Michelle Wu, Boston City Councilor-at-Large

Boston City Councilor At-Large Michelle Wu is an attorney, community advocate, and a resident of the South End. On November 5, 2013, Michelle Wu was elected to the Boston City Council at the age of 28, and is the first Asian-American woman to serve on the Council. She is the Chair of the Committee on Small Business, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and the Committee on Arts and Culture. We have asked Councilor Wu to give her perspective on the BRA's Urban Renewal Plan, her vision for the neighborhood, and the role that she sees for historic preservation in the South End's future.

RSVP REQUIRED. Call 617-536-4445 or email admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org



SEHS Annual Meeting details on page 9

South End Historical Society

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Editors: Stacen Goldman, Kate Hathaway Weeks

Contributors: John Neale, Kate Hathaway Weeks

The SEHS newsletter is a 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, 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 the Supporting (\$100), Patron (\$150) and Benefactor (\$250) levels 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.

The South End Historical Society
532 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02118
(617) 536-4445
admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org
www.southendhistoricalsociety.org

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

We thought it would never come, but the trees are in bloom, the dogs are out in the parks, and baseball season is finally underway! After a record-breaking winter, it's a relief to be outside enjoying our beautiful neighborhood again. I hope this newsletter finds you refreshed and ready to take on the spring.

I am pleased to announce that our annual appeal has been more successful than ever. We asked for your help restoring our historic oriel window, and you delivered! Oriel bays are an iconic feature of South End architecture and ours is badly in need of restoration. It's not too late to contribute to the effort, just cut out and mail the form included in the back of this newsletter along with a check to help make historic preservation happen! As the project progresses, we will keep all of our members up to date on the latest developments and give you an insider's look at the process of restoring architecture in the South End Landmark District.

This newsletter brings you features from two of our very own SEHS Board members and yours truly! First, I sat down with our Communications and Publications Chair, Kate Hathaway Weeks to talk about how anybody can take history into their own hands and play "history detective" for their own homes. Next, SEHS Historian John Neale plays a bit of history detective of his own when he finds a painting with a rare perspective of the early South End.

I encourage you to read this newsletter while reveling in the sunshine at one of the South End's many parks, gardens, or cafes. When you're done, I hope you thoroughly enjoy a slow walk home, taking in all the beautiful sights the South End has to offer in this season. Happy Spring to all!

Stacen Goldman,
Executive Director



Springtime brings beautiful blooms to the SEHS

(continued from page 1)

history detective and tips that will help any curious homeowner find the hidden history in their home.

Kate Hathaway Weeks: *Where do you recommend homeowners begin?*

Stacen Goldman: The most direct place to start is always with the registry of deeds. The Registry of deeds will generally be located in your county seat. The county should hold deeds for your home and property as far back as the inception of the county. This should include the names of past homeowners, the owners of previous buildings on your property, and any speculators who owned your property before your home was built. In some cases, it might even include the name of the builder or developer who built your home. Whether this information will be available online will vary from county to county, but thanks to the fact that it's your home county, you shouldn't have to travel too far to get the information.

KHW: *What is a favorite resource of yours that would surprise most people?*

SG: Historical Maps. What's so great about old maps is that they're just as fun to look at as they are informative! Though you have to track the right map down, once you've found it, there's often a lot of detail included that you wouldn't expect. Addresses, historic lot sizes, and Home- and Landowners are often included on historic maps. If you live in a city, there might be detailed ward maps available for your research. To find maps, you might want to start with your local library or historical society. If your town or city has its own archives, that is a great place to look for ward or assessor's maps that include your property. **Historic New England** has extensive collections, including maps, relating to the history of the region and the **Norman B. Leventhal Map Center** at the Boston Public Library is one of the most extensive and comprehensive collections of

maps in the country. The Leventhal Map Center also has a large number of their collections digitized online. To find more digitized historic maps, you can also check **WardMaps, LLC** (online at wardmaps.com), a great resource for finding digitized historic maps. WardMaps provides digitized images of their maps for free online and sells original antiques and reproductions.

KHW: *What if you are hitting walls early on in the process?*

SG: If all else fails, there's always the Census. America's first census was taken in 1790 a little over a year into George Washington's first term as President. It has been taken every ten years since then, so National census records are as complete as they get. However, getting information about your house from census records can be a little tricky — the census is much easier to search by name than it is to search by address. Additionally, census records are not all digitized in one central



The National Archives Building in Waltham, MA

place by the Federal government. If you want the definitive, comprehensive census records from the Federal Government, you'll have to travel in person to the National Archives. Luckily, this doesn't necessarily mean a trip to D.C., since New England does have its own regional branch of the

archives in Waltham, MA. Many census records have also been digitized by private businesses and non-profit organizations such as **New England Genealogical Historical Society**, **ancestry.com** and **Heritage Quest Online**. These sites can't be searched by address, however all of their searches do allow you to search by census year and location. You'll have to weed through the records once you reach the town level. Some cities and states also collect census data of their own, so don't forget to try your city or state libraries and archives. If you know your city conducts a census, that might be the best place to start, since it's easier to weed through records on the local level.

KHW: *Once you've obtained the name of a past homeowner, speculator, or builder, you might want to do some more extensive research. What are some recommended approaches for anyone who wants to know more than just a name?*



Genealogical research helped the SEHS illuminate the Aertsen-Blair photographic collection, donated in 2011

SG: I would turn to genealogical research. Thanks to the popularity of genealogy, researching your home's historic inhabitants is fairly easy. The above mentioned New England Historic Genealogical Society, ancestry.com and Heritage Quest Online, all use past census data and other historical documents to give you information about the people who lived in or built your historic home. From a genealogical search, you can usually determine a person's occupation, the size of his or her household, his or her place of birth, his or her ethnic background, and the value of his or her estate. Additionally, you can perform some genealogical research on these previous homeowners and find if they have any notable ancestry or descendants of their own!

KHW: *Do you have any tips for history buffs and curious homeowners that may live in a smaller town and are looking to learn more about their local history?*

SG: Especially if you come from a small town, finding some general resources for local history can illuminate a lot of information about your home. The early history of small New England towns is often very insular, with only a few initial settlers inhabiting the town and working the land. If you have an old Colonial or an early Federal home, there's a good chance you can find its first inhabitants among the earliest settlers of your town. Be sure to contact your local historical society, library, and amateur historians to help you get your research off the ground!

This piece was originally published on the Daily Basics.

Kate Hathaway Weeks serves on the SEHS board as the Publications and Communications Chair. She has a love of design, which she tries to balance with life with a toddler son. Kate has worked in public television and publishing with clients that specialize in home, design and art. Kate is a native of Tiverton, RI. Her writing has appeared on pbs.org, thedailybasics.com, and in Design New England magazine.

In Memoriam: Dick Card



Dick Card (right) with SEHS Member David Sprogis at an SEHS Fundraiser

It is with a heavy heart that we must report the passing of our founding President and dear friend Dick Card. Dick passed away at his home in Bath, Maine on the morning of May 7, 2015 at the age of 82. We will further honor his memory with a piece in our Fall 2015 Newsletter.

The South End in the MFA

Thank you to everyone who came out to our spring fundraiser, The South End in the MFA. Over 60 members came to the MFA for a cocktail reception and silent auction. Following the event, attendees were invited to tour the Museum's galleries with our South End in the MFA guidebooks, which explores the history of the South End through the lens of the MFA's fine and decorative arts collections.



Did you miss the fundraiser but still want to take our South End in the MFA self-guided tour? You're in luck!

Guides are on sale in the SEHS offices for \$5. Purchase a guidebook and you can take the tour anytime you like – perfect for a weekend outing, date night, or entertaining guests!

Building Row Houses: Researching a Rare South End Gem



Building Row Houses, 1868 by Frederick Dickenson Williams

by John Neale

Eighteen years ago I was walking through the Ellis Memorial Antiques Show at the Cyclorama when a painting at the Vose Galleries stand caught my eye. It was an oil on canvas landscape in an ornate gilded frame titled “Back Bay View” by Boston painter Frederick D. Williams (1828 – 1915). It shows the sun setting over the western hills in the background while the foreground shows an almost pastoral view of two women and a couple of other figures (perhaps children) on an un-built lot that is below the grade of the new streets surrounding it. On the left side of the painting are a prominent tower and two blocks of row houses. With a date of 1868 on the description card, it immediately got me wondering which part of the Back Bay the artist was depicting. I was suspicious from the start that this might be a view of the new South End being filled in; something never seen before, to my knowledge.

My attempt to solve the puzzle took some research, and ultimately may have contributed to the painting’s eventual title change to “Building Row Houses.” The most prominent

I was suspicious from the start that this might be a view of the new South End being filled in; something never seen before, to my knowledge.

feature, the tower on the left, was the logical place to start looking for a real-world match in the year 1868. It has a

distinctive profile that I was able to quickly narrow down to three potential candidates. Two in the Back Bay shared its approximate outlines, a square tower topped by a steeply sloping roof, flanked by smaller peaked towers near its four corners.



Boston and Providence Railroad, Providence Station, Park Square (Boston Public Library)

Candidate No. 1 was the tower of the Boston and Providence Railroad Depot designed by Peabody and Stearns. It stood where the Boston Park Plaza now stands in Park Square. Seen from certain angles, its small upper gables projected out and could look like small towers. The angle of Columbus Avenue compared to the square blocks around it might

explain the angled view of the block of houses in the painting. The only real problem is that it didn’t exist in 1868, not appearing for another four years in 1872...On to the next candidate then!



Tower of New Old South Church, Boylston Street, 1911 (City of Boston Archives)

Candidate No. 2 remains a prominent feature of one of the best-known churches in Boston today. It’s the tower, or campanile, of Old South Church in Copley Square. The original Venetian Gothic style campanile was larger than the one that we see today, having been replaced in the 1930s by a smaller-scale version after the original began to list due to faulty footings on the filled land. Designed by Charles Amos Cummings (once a Union Park resident) and Willard T. Sears, the campanile is the only one left in the Back Bay or South End today that matches the profile seen in the painting. Once again though, age is the issue. The campanile wasn’t completed until 1875, seven years too late. That leaves only our third and final candidate.

Designed by Charles Amos Cummings (once a Union Park resident) and Willard T. Sears, the campanile is the only one left in the Back Bay or South End today that matches the profile seen in the painting.



Shawmut Congregational Church, Tremont & West Brookline Streets (Boston Public Library)

Candidate No. 3 requires a look back at historic photographs to identify it. For 100 years the huge tower was a striking landmark in the South End, the highlight of an elegant Romanesque Revival structure built in 1863 for the Shawmut Congregational Church at the corner of Tremont and West Brookline Streets. It was designed by architect Charles Edward Parker, the architect of Springfield, Massachusetts’ city hall (1855, destroyed by fire in 1905) and the granite Palazzo/Second Empire Style that is currently the home of the Boston Society of Architects at 50-52 Broad Street in Boston (1852).

Originally the campanile that we see today was topped by a massive belfry that had four pyramidal spires on the corners of a larger pyramidal roof. Four large clocks were set into this upper roof. By 1953, a lack of maintenance led the city of Boston to declare the belfry unsafe so it was cut down to the level we see today. The church suffered a number of fires beginning in 1975, and in 1978 a large fire destroyed most of the building. The South End Historical Society obtained a court injunction to prevent the remainder of the church from being demolished and in 1990 it was rebuilt as condominiums, now called Taino Towers.

Based on the ages of the three candidates, the lost profile of the campanile of the Shawmut Congregational Church is the only viable candidate for Williams' painting, so that mystery is apparently solved. The other question about the view is the matter of the two skewed blocks of row houses that partially obscure the view of the church. No such angled blocks can be

In the background there is a pile driver visible, putting in the essential foundation of the housing being created on the newly made land.

found near the site of the church, which is surrounded by very regular right-angled streets, but their visual profile is very much what we see in some of the blocks of houses on Tremont Street around it. The only solution is that Williams clearly took some artistic liberties with his view for a more picturesque effect.

Other fascinating details in the painting give a sense of the energy and excitement people must have felt in 1868, as a new section of the city was created from the marshy waters of the Back Bay and South Bay. Carriages are in motion everywhere, people are strolling about, and two bridges that look temporary can be seen spanning what appears to be a set of railroad tracks. Steam can be seen rising from around the tracks, possibly the product of a passing train. In the background there is a pile driver visible, putting in the essential foundation of the housing being created on the newly made land.

Williams has gathered together a whole series of elements that collectively represent the entire process of the filling of Boston's new South End. From an empty lot to finished rows of houses and a landmark church, we see the beginning and the end of the process. The passing train may even be carrying fill to create more land. Considering all the activity and bustle around them, the figures in the foreground and the setting sun are the only parts of the image that project any sense of stillness.

The actual painting remains in private hands, but a photographic copy is now on display at the South End Historical Society. It's a rare survivor with an even rarer view of a city in transition. Williams married in 1870 and moved to Paris in 1874, returning to Boston in 1888. In 1904, a fire devastated the Harcourt Studio Building where he worked, destroying all of his work housed there. I have not yet seen any other painting by Williams that depicts Boston, but I will be keeping my eyes open for it.

John Neale is the official Historian of the South End Historical Society and a South End resident of 25 years. Come see the print of "Building Row Houses" on display in the South End Historical Society offices. 🏠



Pictures from SEHS Collection Available for Reproduction

Pictures from the South End Historical Society's collections are available for reproduction. Fees vary depending on the photograph and the intended use.

Most reproduction requests ask for images from our popular 1972 South End Streets Survey. The Streets Survey includes approximately 3,000 images taken by the Historical Society in 1972 documenting every extant South End building. These images were used in the Historical Society's application to place the South End on the National Register of Historic Places, which was successful. Image reproductions from the South End Streets Survey carry a fee of \$30 each for a 300 dpi digital copy.

If you are interested in reproducing a SEHS image for personal, commercial, or research purposes, please contact us at 617-536-4445 or admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org for more information about our image collection, fees, and policies.



Image from the 1972 South End Streets Survey



South End Historical Society Nominating Slate 2015 Annual Meeting

The Nominating Committee, consisting of Maryellen Hassell, Frances Blair, Harvey Wolkoff, Jennifer Girvin, and Ted Vasiliou, has proposed the following slate of officers and directors: All terms are two years unless otherwise noted

President:	Michael Leabman
Second Vice President:	Rob Kilgore
Secretary:	Anne Smart
Fundraising Chair:	Nancy Parker Wilson
Community Relations Chair:	Cathy Marotta
Membership Chair:	Antony Hill
Communications/Publications Chair:	Kate Hathaway Weeks

THE SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY

49th Annual Meeting

June 11th, 2015 · 6:30 PM

Agenda

Presiding: Michael Leabman, President

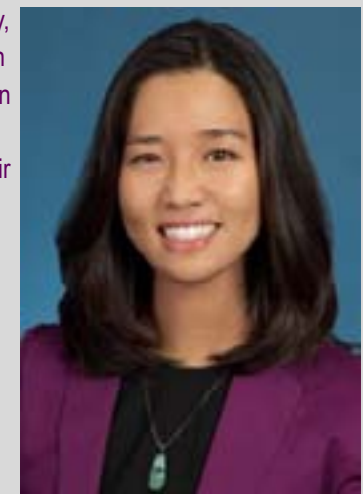
- Annual Report: Michael Leabman
- Treasurer's Report: Maryellen Hassell
- Nominating Committee Report: Maryellen Hassell
- Election of SEHS Officers and Directors
only current SEHS Members can vote for officers and directors
- Keynote Speaker

Keynote

Michelle Wu, Boston City Councilor-at-Large

Boston City Councilor At-Large Michelle Wu is an attorney, community advocate, and a resident of the South End. On November 5, 2013, Michelle Wu was elected to the Boston City Council at the age of 28, and is the first Asian-American woman to serve on the Council. She is the Chair of the Committee on Small Business, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and the Committee on Arts and Culture.

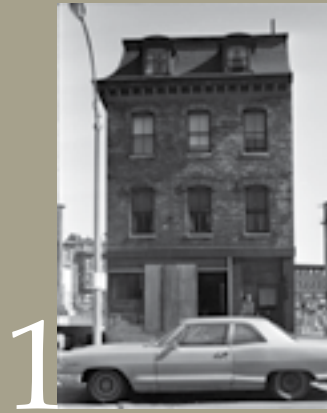
We have asked Councilor Wu to give her perspective on the BRA's Urban Renewal Plan, her vision for the neighborhood, and the role that she sees for historic preservation in the South End's future.



RSVP REQUIRED. Call 617-536-4445 or email admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org

Guess that Landmark!

The South End has changed a lot in the past 50 years, can you guess the following locations from our 1972 South End Streets Survey?
(Answers at bottom of the page)



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8

- Answers:
1. 8 Warren Avenue, corner Berkeley Street, now Atelier
2. Joshua Bates School, 731 Harrison Avenue
3. 564-566 Columbus Avenue, corner Mass Ave, now Harriet Tubman House
4. Franklin Square House, 11 East Newton St., seen from Franklin Square
5. 34-8 West Dehann Street, looking from Shawmut Ave. to Washington Street, now Blackstone School
6. 1237-1311 Washington Street, now Peters Park
7. 4 Farnmouth Street
8. Hayes Park, Warren Avenue and West Canton Street

Volunteer Opportunities

Want to be more involved with the SEHS? We always need new volunteers! We have opportunities for volunteers in: the SEHS newsletter, fundraisers (Spring Ball and/or House Tour), collections, office tasks, preservation, history related projects, programs and events

Interested or have questions? Call Stacen Goldman at 617-536-4445 or email her at admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org.



MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

Our membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. If you have not yet renewed for 2015, please do so soon. Individual memberships are \$25 and family/dual memberships are \$40. Additional opportunities to support the Society include the supporting membership at \$100 (\$60 tax-deductible), the patron membership at \$150 (\$110 tax-deductible), and the benefactor membership at \$250 (\$210 tax-deductible). Checks for membership payments can be made out to South End Historical Society and sent to the same at 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118. Or you may visit our website at southendhistoricalsociety.org/membership and renew online with a credit card. All memberships that aren't renewed by May 1st are considered lapsed and membership benefits will cease.



Cast Iron Questions?

Need help restoring, repairing, or replacing your cast iron fence? The South End Historical Society can help! Call or email us at 617-536-4445 or admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org for more information.



Help us Restore our Oriel!



Help us turn this



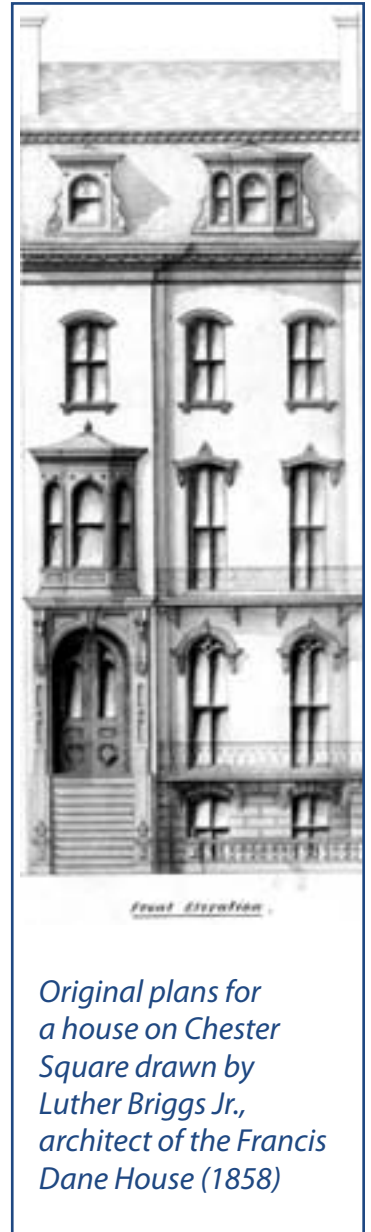
into this

Our beautiful oriel window is a distinctive feature of our historic rowhouse, and this year's record-breaking winter took a harsh toll on its already deteriorated architectural detail. Proudly presented above our front door, wooden oriels like ours are a significant design element throughout the South End and their intricate detail adds to the rich visual fabric of the neighborhood. In the upcoming year, we hope to fully restore the functionality, structure, and detail of this iconic architectural feature. While our appeal to restore the oriel was our most successful annual appeal ever, we could still use your help!

If you would like to donate to help restore this beautiful piece of South End architecture, fill out the form below and return with a check to the South End Historical Society, 532 Massachusetts Ave. Boston, MA 02118.

You can also donate online at www.southendhistoricalsociety.org

All contributions are 100% tax deductible.



Original plans for a house on Chester Square drawn by Luther Briggs Jr., architect of the Francis Dane House (1858)



I Support the South End Historical Society!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail address: _____ Telephone: _____

Enclosed is my contribution of: \$ _____