Dear Members,

Happy spring! Our winter was a busy one here at the SEHS office. We've been working on several projects, including the planning for our 46th Annual Spring Ball. We're very excited about this year's Ball, "A Venetian Masquerade," scheduled for Saturday, April 28th at the Lenox Hotel's Dome Room. We've expanded our silent auction, hired the popular regional band Malloi, and will be giving prizes to the attendees with the most creative, classic, and elegant masks. Visit our website at southendhistoricalsociety.org for more information and to purchase tickets online. Tickets can also be purchased by calling the office at 617-536-4445.

We launched our oral history project, "Long-Time South Enders: Experiences in a Changing Neighborhood," and so far have conducted three interviews with plans to record several more. The interviews are being transcribed now and we will feature excerpts from the transcriptions in upcoming newsletters. Special thanks to Alison Barnet, Patricia Bonner, Hugh Bonner, Joanne Bonner, Anne Bonner, and Gloria Ganno for contributing to this project.

In addition to the oral history project, fundraising, forming new walking tours, and receiving and cataloging new donations, we've also taken on blogging. I've had the pleasure of writing a history blog for the South End Patch and for Boston.com's Your Town South End. We had so many wonderful responses from these two endeavors that I've recently launched our own blog at southendhistory.org. I post stories about South End history and also list upcoming events. Be sure to visit it and let us know what you think.

I hope to see you soon at one of our upcoming events. We have several programs planned for both May and June. Check out the Events and Walking Tours Calendar on page 4 for more details!

Hope Shannon
Executive Director

For more frequent updates, follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Pinterest,
On Twitter at twitter.com/southendhistsoc
And on our blog at southendhistory.org
Loners, Culpritesses, and the Undomiciled
by Alison Barnet

Spend any time at all with John Sacco (pictured above) and he’ll tell you some fascinating fact you couldn’t possibly have known. At the old 411 Lounge on Columbus Ave., for instance, the prostitutes’ drink of choice was Scotch and milk.

Sacco was the author of the South End News police report from the first issue in 1980 until his retirement from the police department in 1999. Other newspapers have tried to copy his style but have never been able to manage his particular blend of blunt fact, humor, police jargon, and compassion for people down on their luck. The Herald’s Peter Gelzinis once called him “the patron saint of all community police officers—and poet laureate of the South End News’s Police Beat Column,” Jean Riesman, also of the Herald, thought he was “the Balzac of Warren Avenue” (the station house was then on the corner of Warren and Berkeley); and Ric Kahn of the Phoenix found the report “Runyonesque.”

How did it come about?

In the Seventies, the Boston Police Department wanted its officers to have more interaction with the community. Officer Sacco, who was assigned to District 4 (now D-4) in the mid-Sixties and had

gotten to know the South End well, was asked to be a Community Service Officer. The captain wanted him to “put something in the local paper.”

“English was my worst subject,” Sacco told the crowd at a recent appearance at the South End library. “I went to Boston Trade where I learned to splice wires. I couldn’t type. I couldn’t write. My handwriting was atrocious, and the captain couldn’t read it. ‘Can you print?’ he asked me.”

Sacco looked at newspapers and found the stories “cut and dried—’Man hits woman.’” Then he looked back to the old Mid-Town Journal and its Iben Snupin gossip column. [See South End Historical Society’s fall 2011 newsletter: “Iben Snupin: Fred Shibley and the Mid-Town Journal”]

“I copied his style.”

Girl Friend Kayoes Cop with Shoe
As Blushing Bride Wields Knife
Mid-Town Journal, August 1, 1941

Cutie Talked Into
Strip During Taxi
Trip, Cabby Nipped
Mid-Town Journal, November 29, 1965

The captain gave him a typewriter, and Sacco began typing—with one finger. “Thank God for Wite-out!” he says.

The local newspaper at the time was the South End Chronicle, a short-lived, ten-cent broadside edited by long-time South Ender Norma Gramer but published by a North Ender. The police report was on page 5.

"In a recent apartment break, the thief ripped the entire door jam off along with a good portion of the wall. A next door neighbor heard all the noise
but did not think anything of it. She was engrossed in a t.v. story, a telephone was sitting on a table right next to her. These sort [sic] of things happen all to [sic] often. You can get to know your neighbors without being personal for a common interest."
South End Chronicle, February 18, 1977

"A long sought after Roxbury man was finally arrested after a diligent [sic] investigation. This man was responsible for committing [sic] 57 robberies. He would hand his victims a note [sic] stating Hand over your money or I’ll shot. Noticing that he misspelled “shoot” wrong, he would calmly make the correction on the note and hand it back to his victim."
South End Chronicle, February 25, 1977

Sacco’s column was so bad it was good.

When Skip Rosenthal and I started the South End News in 1980, we decided to engage the same Officer John Sacco who had written the Chronicle’s police report three years earlier. His colorful reports with their full inventive spelling, fortuitous typos, and odd details were masterpieces of black humor, and we loved them.

continued on page 6...

Officer Sacco upon retirement in 1999.

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Editors: Shelby Larsson, Hope Shannon
Contributors: Alison Barnet

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
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SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY (SEHS)
Upcoming Programs and Walking Tours

Reservations required for all. Please email admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org or call 617-536-4445 to sign up.

April

46th Annual Spring Ball
“A Venetian Masquerade”

Saturday April 28th, 8pm to midnight, in The Dome Room of the historic Lenox Hotel, 61 Exeter Street. Join us for a night of dancing, light fare and dessert, a silent auction, and entertainment by the popular band Malloi and lead singer Kelley Lennon. We will be giving prizes for the best masks. The event is creative black tie. For tickets or information, please contact the Society at 617-536-4445 or admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org or visit our website at www.southendhistoricalsociety.org.

May

Saturday, May 5th:
"Architectural Walking Tour of the South End"
Join John Neale, SEHS Historian, as he discusses the South End’s unique architectural character and the development of the neighborhood.
When: 10am
Where: You will be told the meeting location when you sign up.
Free for SEHS members. $10 for non-members.

Thursday, 5/17:
"The South End Landmark District: A Guide for Homeowners"
Landmark District Preservation Planner Walter Maros will present a slideshow to familiarize residents with the guidelines that are used by the South End Landmark District Commission (SELD) when it reviews proposals for changes to the exterior of buildings in the South End.
Q & A session to follow.
Where: 532 Massachusetts Ave.
When: 6:30pm
Free and open to the public

Monday, May 21st:
"Civil War Walking Tour of Boston"
Join author Barbara Berensen as she discusses important Civil War points of interest in downtown Boston. Her book, Civil War Walking Tours of Boston, will be for sale.
When: 6pm
Where: You will be given the meeting location when you sign up.
Free for SEHS members.

Thursday, 5/24:
Lecture and presentation by Richard Vacca
Where: 532 Massachusetts Avenue 
When: 6:30 pm
Join us for Mr. Vacca’s presentation on his new book about Boston’s Jazz history.
The book will be offered for sale at the event. Free for SEHS members. $5 suggested donation for non-members.
Space is limited. Reservations required. Please email admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org or call 617-536-4445 to sign up.

June

Sunday, 6/3:
"South End History: An Overview"
Lecture and presentation by Hope Shannon, Executive Director
South End Historical Society
Join us for a 45 minute overview of South End history from made land to urban renewal and more.
Where: 532 Massachusetts Avenue
When: 2pm
Free and open to the public.

Saturday, June 9th:
"Walking Tour of South End Hospital History"
Join local historian Alison Barnet as she explores the history behind Boston City Hospital, Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital, Children's Hospital, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and many more.
When: 10am
Where: You will be given the meeting location when you sign up.
Free for SEHS members. $10 for non-members.

Thursday, 6/21:
SEHS Annual Meeting
Annual Reports and Board Elections Followed by a presentation by local historian Jim Vrabel about his Boston History Database. Mr. Vrabel is the author of When in Boston: A Timeline and Almanac
Where: 532 Massachusetts Avenue
When: 6pm
Free for SEHS members. $5 suggested donation for non-members. Only current members can vote at the Annual Meeting.

Reservations required for all. Please email admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org or call 617-536-4445 to sign up.
One morning in late January, I answered the SEHS office phone.
Caller: “Good morning. I have an unusual question. In 1972 I attended an event that the South End Historical Society held. It was a Ball at the Back Bay railroad station. Do you know the date that the Ball was held that year?”
Me: “I’m not sure, but I can find out. May I ask why?”
Caller: “I met my husband there. This year marks the 40th anniversary of that date.”
She told me her name, Lael Montgomery, and I told her I’d search and call her back.

I went into our archives and found one copy of the 1972 Ball invitation. The date: January 28th, 1972. We have a few pictures from our balls but nothing from 1972. However, I knew that sometimes the Boston Globe wrote articles about our early balls. I looked for any reports of the 1972 ball in old issues of the Globe and, to my astonishment, I found an article about the ball with a large picture of three women. The caption reads: “BUBBLY AT THE BALL: Janet Chute, Catherine Hinds, and Lael Montgomery (left to right) celebrate at the South End Historical Society ball at the Back Bay railroad station last night.”

I called her back and told her I found the invitation, which I scanned and sent her a copy of, and a Globe article with her picture on it.
Lael replied, “I remember that article; my father called me the next morning and asked me if I had seen the Globe yet.”

We chatted a bit about the event and about the transportation. Many of the guests, Lael included, took the train from downtown Boston into Back Bay station, where they disembarked. Some dressed to match the ball’s Victorian theme. Other passengers, on their way through Back Bay station, must have been astonished to see the ball attendees on the train cars, headed to a dinner and dance.

Lael sent me a picture of herself and her husband and a few days later, she emailed me to let me know that they celebrated both their 40th anniversary of meeting and her birthday with a party, complete with centerpieces of enlarged 1972 ball invitations. So happy anniversary of meeting to Jon and Lael! I’m glad that our 1972 ball (and our 6th, I believe) holds such a special place in your hearts!

Our 46th Annual Ball, “A Venetian Masquerade,” will take place on Saturday, April 28th, at the Lenox Hotel, corner of Exeter and Boylston Streets. At this “Venetian Masquerade,” guests are encouraged to don masks. Along with food, drink, dancing, and our silent auction, we will award prizes to those with the most elegant, classic, and creative masks.
Skip called Station 4 and found Officer Sacco willing—a major coup. We’d always assumed that Gramer hadn’t copyedited, but when Sacco handed over his first report, we understood her dilemma. The reports were typed all in caps, single-spaced with no margins, and sometimes the words danced right off the page. There was no room whatsoever for editing marks. The first thing I did was retype everything, just to get a handle on it.

All of the items came from the incident reports submitted by police officers, public information that was used in court. Sacco would ask the officers involved for more details and “fill it in.” He admits he sometimes “gave advice at the end.”

An original column, October 19, 1980

BOSTON POLICE REPORT

BY JOHN SACCO

DEPUTY SUPERINTENDANT WARREN BLAIR HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO DISTRICT FOUR.
THE DEPUTY BRINGS MANY YEARS OF COMMAND EXPERIENCE TO OUR AREA.
WE ALL WISH DEPUTY JAMES MACDONALD WELL IN HIS NEW ASSIGNMENT TO DISTRICT 11
IN DORCHESTER.

A SOUTH END MAN WAS ARRESTED AFTER HE SMASHED IN THE WINDOW OF LANKIS LIQUOR
STORE TO STEAL A CARTON OF CIGARETTES.
A FEMALE FROM THE CATHEDRAL PROJECT RAISED HELL WITH THE PROPRIETOR OF THE
COMENA FOOD STORE AFTER HE STOPPED HER DAUGHTER FROM SHOPLIFTING. THE FEMALE
THREATENED THE STORE KEEPER WITH A KNIFE FOR, “BOtherING HER DAUGHTER”.
OFFICERS TULLEY & KELLY ARRESTED A SUSPECT WHO MUGGED AND ROBBED A MAN IN FRONT
OF 1850 WASHINGTON STREET. THE SUSPECT WAS WEARING A WRIST WATCH THAT BELONGED
TO ANOTHER ROBBERY VICTIM. THE SECOND VICTIM WAS CALLED INTO DISTRICT FOUR
WHERE HE IDENTIFIED HIS WATCH.

A SHAWMUT AVE RESIDENT WHILE WALKING PAST PETERS PARK WAS ASSAULTED BY A MAN
WHO THREATENED HER WITH A SWITCH BLADE KNIFE. THE VICTIM SCREAMED AND RAN INTO
THE LEBANESE CLUB. A WISE MOVE. THE CLUB MEMBERS CHASED THE SUSPECT INTO THE
ARMS OF A POLICE CRUISER. THE SUSPECT WAS ARRESTED BY DETECTIVES DRISCOLL &
MANFRA.

A REVERE RESIDENT WAS ASSAULTED AND BEATEN BY THREE MEN AS HE WAS WALKING ON
TREMONT STREET AT DIGHT. THE SUSPECTS WERE ARRESTED AFTER THE BEAT THE VICTIM
WITH A LARGE BOTTLE.

A DORCHESTER RESIDENT WHILE SITTING WITH HIS TWO YEAR OLD SON IN SBARRO PARK
WAS APPROACHED BY A FEMALE WHO PUT A KNIFE TO HIS SONS THROAT AND DEMANDED ALL
OF HIS MONEY. THE VICTIM GAVE UP HIS MONEY THE SUSPECT FLED AND WAS LATER
ARRESTED BY POLICE AFTER A DILLIGENT SEARCH.

A ROXBURY RESIDENT WAS ARRESTED FOR BREAKING INTO A WEST SPRINGFIELD ST. HOME
A GREENWICH PARK RESIDENT IDENTIFIED PHOTOS OF A MAN WHO HELD HIM UP WITH A
GUN. THE SUSPECT LIVED IN THE CASTLE SQUARE DEVELOPMENT.

A RESIDENT OF SHAWMUT AVE WAS HAVING CONVERSATION WITH A MAN FROM RUTLAND
STREET, THE RUTLAND STREET RESIDENT SUDDENLY PULLED A KNIFE & SCISSORS AND
BEGAN STABBING THE OTHER MAN CAUSING SEVERE WOUNDS. THE SUSPECT WAS ARRESTED.

A YARMOUTH STREET RESIDENT WAS MUGGED & ROBBED BY A MAN WHO STATED TO VICTIM
THAT HE HAD NOTHING AGAINST HIM BUT WAS ROBBING HIM TO RECoup HIS LOSSES WHEN
HE HIMSELF WAS A VICTIM OF AN EARLIER ROBBERY, THE SUSPECT WAS ARRESTED.

DETECTIVES BALLARD & NARISCO CLEARED UP A MULTITUDE OF SOUTH END BURGLARIES
AFTER THEY LIFTED A FINGER PRINT IN ONE OF THE APARTMENTS. A SUSPECT IS NOW IN
CUSTODY.

A SUSPECT WAS ARRESTED ON WAREN AVE AFTER HE THREATENED TO HIT ANOTHER MAN WITH
A SIDEWALK BRICK. A YOUNG BOY PASSING BY THOSSED HIS BASE BALL BAT TO THE VICTIM
WHO USED IT TO WARD OFF HIS ATTACKER.

TWO BUSINESS PARTNERS WHO OWNED A NORTH HAMPTON STREET LEASING COMPANY HAD AN
ARGUMENT, ONE OF THE PARTNERS PULLED A GUN AND FIRED THREE SHOTS AT HIS PARTNER.
LUCKILY ALL SHOTS MISSED. THE MAN WAS ARRESTED. THE PARTNERSHIP DESOVED.

OFFICERS HUBERT & MOY ARRESTED A ROXBURY MAN FOR BREAKING INTO A DARTMOUTH PL
LIFE. THE SUSPECT WAS FOUND WITH MANHATTAN BELONGING TO ANOTHER VICTIM.
Once in a while, there were complaints. Sacco usually referred to people as “male” and “female” but often used the word “girl” where it was hard to tell whether he meant girl or woman. Sometimes I got lazy and allowed “girl” to prevail but was then reprimanded by readers—and rightly so.

Prostitutes figured prominently. He gave them funny names, or so I thought.

"'Angie,' 'The Dummy,' 'Rosie,'
'Jeanne the Beanie' and 'Natasha' are still with us. These old timers believe that you can still work after retirement and are proving it every day."
South End News, April 5, 1980

Months later, I discovered that Sacco’s quote marks were for naught. The Dummy was the derogatory name people gave the deaf prostitute; Natasha had long since gone to a rest home. Although johns were never named, arresting officers were prominently mentioned. Sacco admits to giving his partners a “boost.”

If he didn’t make up names, he did make up words, sometimes in reaction to criticism. Once, after getting an angry letter from a man who objected to the word “homeless”—everyone has a home even if it’s a cardboard box—Sacco came up with “undomiciled.” Prostitutes became “working girls;” female perpetrators “culpitesses.”

Sacco once asked for help identifying a man found dead of a heart attack on the street. He gave us a photo and the information that the man was about 70, 5-7, 130 lbs, and “speaks with slight accent possibly slavic, shakes a lot.” This gave us a laugh, but we thought it wasn’t in good taste to print the photo and didn’t. Months later, Sacco unraveled the mystery.

The man was:

"A loner who kept to himself, had no family and associated with no-one. A woman who occupied the room next to [his] offered to identify the body. She is a small frail lady who worked for years as a waitress in many of the former honkie tonk joints in the South End. This woman has a heart as big as the Hancock Tower. After identifying [him], she said a brief prayer and told me that she would light a
"A long time ago at the beginning of gentrification, there was a bar on Washington Street down near the Old Oak Tavern and it was owned by Eddy Sherman. People said places like that, with that clientele, should be closed down. Did it ever occur to them that the people who went there were lonely hearts? They lived alone for a reason: maybe their spouse died, they were widowed, estranged from their family, had a drinking problem—a million things. However, they were not hermits. The bar was the center of their social life. Maybe they had a coat hanger on their TV, some channels came in scratchy. So they go down to the bar, sit at a booth, buy a few beers and gab. The bookie comes by so maybe they play a dog double. It’s a little excitement. When the bars were closed, the rug was pulled out from under them. Where’s their social life now?"

Story told to me, October 23, 2006

Alison Barnet has lived in the South End since 1964. She is the author of Extravaganza King: Robert Barnet and Boston Musical Theater.

Candle for him and say a prayer for his soul every day. It’s nice to know that [the man] will be remembered, and it’s nice to know that people like Audrey are still around.

South End News, August 23, 1980

Clearly, Sacco had just as big a heart.

Back then, if you happened to encounter Officer Sacco on one of his “details” at Harry the Greek’s, Sheffield’s Wine and Spirits, Zapatos, or Blanchard’s Liquors (in more recent times, at the JFK Library where he is Chief of Security), you might get the master storyteller off to yourself. Stories told while standing around in stores often proved better than his column. But maybe not better than this: his horoscope column in the American Police Beat newspaper. “Star Gazer” started with a bizarre problem, made up by Sacco, followed by off-the-wall advice complete with quotes by bogus Eastern philosophers. Sacco’s presentations at the South End library have also had people rolling in the aisles.

John Sacco was born in Roxbury in 1934 and grew up in the Mission Hill projects where Italians were in the minority; most of his friends were Irish. After graduating from Boston Trade High School, he worked briefly at the Fenway Sears. He was stationed in Germany for a couple of years with the Army, and when he returned in 1957, everyone urged him to get a Civil Service job, so he joined the police force. Two years later he married Marie of the North End.

Married 53 years, they have three daughters, thirteen grandchildren, and a brand new great-granddaughter. In his spare time, he swims, cooks, and gardens.

Initially assigned to District 13 in Jamaica Plain, Sacco also worked in Roxbury and the North End before being sent to the South End in the mid-Sixties. It was thought, because he speaks Italian—“a foreign tongue”—that he could communicate with the Puerto Rican newcomers. Although this didn’t make much sense, the South End turned out to be a good fit, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Welcome to our new members

Linda Loney
Lynne Potts
Joshua and Genine Tillotson
Ryan Oldham and Julie Tremblay
Carla Ricci
William Turbert
Stephen and Marianne Kinzer
Robert Dunn
William O’Connell
Emily Robbins
Jim O’Donnell and Carol Blair
Ramy Rizkalla
Michael and Pamela Noble
Crispin Richey
Jessica Arnold

Stuart and Teri Schnitt
Linda Esposito
Tom Stults
Michael Mullins
Kathleen Coleman
Jon Santiago
Kristen Massimine
Paul and Danielle Schreier
Chris Coveney
Scott Mabel
Amy and David Goldminz
Derek Christensen
Chuck and Narcisa Laranjeira
Kathleen Bennett
Ed Lemay

Cast Iron Questions?
Need help restoring, repairing, or replacing your cast-iron fence? The South End Historical Society can help! Call or email the SEHS office at (617) 536-4445 or admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org for more information.
Urgent! Annual Appeal Reminder

Our Annual Appeal is currently underway and we hope that you can make a donation. **We have received an unprecedented number of donations** to our collections throughout the last year. Every item that we receive requires cataloging and supplies to store it under proper archival conditions. Last year your donations allowed us to purchase upgraded collections software as well as a computer that we use exclusively for collections management. This year we will be using our annual appeal funds to purchase adequate archival storage materials and to fund our ongoing oral history project. Please help us to preserve these items; saving them now ensures their survival for future South Enders and Bostonians.

To make a donation (any amount helps!) please send a check to South End Historical Society, 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118 or visit our website at http://www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/index.htm to make a donation via PayPal.

**All donations are 100% tax deductible!**

Want to be more involved with the SEHS?

We always need new volunteers! We have opportunities for volunteers in: Newsletter, fundraisers (Spring Ball and/or House Tour), collections, office tasks, preservation, history related projects, programs and events

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

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**Know somebody who would enjoy this newsletter?**
Forward it today and invite them to become a member of the South End Historical Society.

Name: ____________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________
City: __________________________________ State: ___________ Zip: ___________
E-mail address: ____________________________ Telephone: ____________________________

Would you prefer that we correspond with you through regular mail or e-mail?
Please circle one: Regular Mail / E-mail

Membership levels (Check One):
___ $25 Individual ___ $40 Family/Dual ___ $100 Supporting ___ $150 Patron ___ $250 Benefactor

Please make check payable to: The South End Historical Society
Mailing address: 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118

I am interested in volunteering for:
___ Preservation ___ Spring Ball Committee ___ Membership ___ Programs/Events
___ Newsletter ___ Collections ___ House Tour Sitting ___ House Tour Committee

***New members can also join and pay online by visiting www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/membership.htm***