



The South End Historical Society NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402 — Vol. 23 No. 5, Winter 1994

“EVERYONE ACKNOWLEDGES that the South End squares are modeled on the English residential square, but few realize just how similar they are and, even more important, what a unique treasure is hidden in Boston's South End — four out of five intact residential squares!”

The full story of the history of the residential square that first appeared in London in the early seventeenth century and was transplanted to Boston by Charles Bulfinch is told by Phebe S. Goodman in her recent historic landscape report: *Part One: The Residential Square Transplanted — London to Boston* and *Part Two: Boston's South End Squares — Inventory, Analysis, and Recommendations*. A review copy of the set is available at The South End Historical Society, and further copies can be ordered through the society for \$35 per set. Call 536-4445 for more information.

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Residents Seek Restoration for Chester Square

BY PHEBE S. GOODMAN

AS THE CITY of Boston begins to solicit community input for the redesign of Massachusetts Avenue, it is appropriate to consider the major role this unusually wide street played in the development of the South End and the current efforts of city residents to restore its historic focal point, Chester Square.

The city created Chester Street and Chester Square in 1850 as a grand boulevard and residential square which would serve as a landscape amenity to keep the newly emerging middle classes from moving to the suburbs. Unfortunately, on the 100th anniversary of its design, in 1952, the city destroyed

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A view across Chester Square, circa 1859, showing 544 and 546 Massachusetts Avenue.

Photo: The Bostonian Society

Enrich Your Life — Preserve a Tree

By E. DOMURAD

ARBORIST PETER WILD believes that trees can and should be preserved just as buildings are. The founder of Boston Tree Preservation, Wild is actively identifying what he calls majestic and prominent trees in the landscape. He finally settled on these adjectives to describe the grand old trees growing all around us because to him all trees are valuable.

The tree is a system that can live forever, but insects, disease, and environmental stress all work on trees to shorten their lives. Over the next 20 years Wild predicts that we will probably lose the majority of the majestic and prominent trees in the landscape. The urbanization of growing communities after World War II encroached on trees, and fifty years later they are struggling to survive amidst construction, pavement, pollution, erratic water tables, and depletion of nutrients in the soil.

Working in the midst of this tree crisis as an arborist, Wild frequently arrived on the scene to find a tree that had been declining for decades. Yet, with tree preservation techniques and monitoring of a tree's health, its life could be prolonged. The Winchester Tree Service, the first company he began after completing his studies in arboriculture, evolved into Boston Tree Preservation. The mission of BTP: identify prominent trees in the landscape and urge owners to take the first step to protect and preserve them *before* their health begins to decline. Part of Wild's effort is to send letters to owners of majestic trees offering an evaluation and identification tag giving the tree's genus and species. His company also sets aside a percentage of profits to offer scholarship programs for trees that no one can afford to maintain. In what must be a testimony to people's love of trees, everyone he has approached has eagerly said, "What do we do? Where do we start?"

ELMS IN THE SOUTH END

The mighty American elm with its giant arms arched over the avenues is largely a matter of time. Memories of elms at home influenced the first settlers' choice of the elm as the street tree in their villages. Twenty-year-old trees could be transplanted from the woods to the roadside because their fleshy roots lived near the surface of the ground. The roots ranged freely; the spreading tops were self-pruning. Every year added to the trees' stature until they developed into beloved giants. Attacked by many predators — the tussock moths, the elm-leaf beetle, and the brown tail — many of the elms in other neighborhoods finally succumbed to the Dutch elm disease

transmitted by bark beetles. With each new onset of insects and disease, people have time and again made the elm's fight their own.

Consider the Burlington corporation, proud of their many trees, who enlisted BTP to survey their tree population and begin a replacement program. The results of the survey revealed not one elm. The South End, on the other hand, has the good fortune to possess a rare collection of healthy elm trees.

"The elms on Warren Avenue are extraordinary, but there's not a street around in the South End," observed Wild, whose obsession with trees began long before he was big enough to climb them, "where a giant old elm doesn't just jump out and hit you as beautiful."

As an arborist, Wild's theory of why a species hard hit by disease should continue to flourish in the South End centers on the moist condition of the neighborhood's soil, a marshland, which may have helped the elms here to ward off the disease. Soils heavy in clay and sand with lots of moisture due to a high water table help the trees to thrive. A soil that may not look all that rich and loamy can still contain sand and clay, the most important part of soil. Sand adds porosity, while clay, the only electrically charged particle in soil, helps to determine the pH level, offering the potential for many available nutrients.

Asphalt, Wild conjectures, could help to preserve moisture in the soil so it doesn't evaporate too quickly. One of the most prevalent products of urbanization, asphalt may actually be healthful to trees and part of the reason they have done so well.

WORCESTER SQUARE

Worcester Square's central courtyard is filled with elms. Boston University Medical Associates contributed to a



Peter Wild — using a shigometer to test the vigor of the cambium on an ailanthus tree, which is something like taking the tree's temperature. After vandals cut the bark off all around the trunk, he found one small strip of cambium layer that was intact. The tree thrives today on Concord Square.

maintenance program for these elms where BTP fertilized the soil with seaweed containing 50 micronutrients as well as vitamins, humic acids, and calcium to help fix the pH around the plants, build root vitality, and supply food for the trees rather than stimulants that only deplete food resources in order to produce immediate results. BTP's subsurface fertilization method helps to aerate the soils as well as fertilize them. With minimal dosages over a sustained period, arborists can raise the pH around the plant, thereby strengthening the structure and content of the soil.

Fortified, the plants can improve their health and withstand certain thresholds of insect pests. Woodland trees gather their vital nutrients from the rich soil surrounding their roots that is annually replenished by the decomposition of fallen leaves. In the urban forest trees typically last only 20 to 30 years. Trees that are now 90 to 100 years old had, at one time, good soil, which gave them the resources they needed to thrive. With proper soil management using subsurface fertilization to fortify the soil annually, an arborist can alleviate the problems of compaction and poor soil structure. Without proper soil even the young trees being planted now will not survive. At Worcester Square the elms, having survived Dutch elm disease, are infested and dying from elm bark scale, caused by an insect that feeds by sucking juices from the trees' twigs.

Situations like these can be frustrating for the arborist. Arboriculture on a professional level is a new industry. Only 20 years ago, the arborist was often a moonlighting fireman, or policeman, or someone crazy enough to climb a tree with a chain or hand saw. That Wild is an arborist who is certified by the Massachusetts Arborists' Association is an insurance policy to the people who hire him that he is a trained and educated professional.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH TREES

Wild thanks a major recession for a career that has rewarded him for more than 20 years. He studied construction and highway surveying at Franklin Institute but graduated to find that most work for surveyors had been eliminated. Returning to his first love, tree work, he enrolled at the University of Massachusetts' Stockbridge School of Agriculture.

"I just fell into it," he quipped. "As a child, I couldn't wait to be big enough to start that lawn mower or use those giant scissors to start trimming things. Call it a busman's holiday, but I also love tree work as an avocation. It's that kind of field. Once you are aware of soils, botany, insects and how they are working for us, you start to develop a recognition of trees, shrubs, mosses, grasses, and flowers, and how they have been affected physiologically. To go for a walk down the street, whether in the city or through the forest, makes you aware of the vital relationship between us and nature. Other people are obviously feeling that way too. I can't go to a social event, run an errand, or go to church without meeting people with a few urgent questions."

Tree preservation is not a new idea. In Phebe S. Goodman's recent report: *Part One: The Residential Square Transplanted — London to Boston*, she cites the work of Camillo Sitte, *The Birth of*

City Planning, published in 1889 in Vienna. "Old trees," Sitte wrote, "should be saved." Tree professionals have been around since the late nineteenth century, but they now have time-proven techniques, environmentally friendly products, and methods of preserving and prolonging the lives of trees such as the elms in Worcester Square where their demise will result from the curable disease of elm bark scale. Worcester Square has more elms than any of the other historic South End residential squares. Union Square has one; Blackstone and Franklin Squares share an old Siberian elm. With five elms in Worcester Square it is sad to see them decline because they haven't been cared for.

ANOTHER ELM STORY

Elm bark scale also hit the tree in the alley behind the house of Susan Park, treasurer of The SEHS, who organized a neighborhood effort to preserve the life of that tree seven years ago when it had a life expectancy of only two or three years. Wild gave it a thorough pruning and much TLC. Its physiological problems, a huge bifurcation and unfortunate location near the path of trucks that sideswipe it, mean that one day the tree will die, signalling mother nature's forces to send in the insects, disease, bacteria, and fungi that will start breaking it down just as in the forest where trees weakened by disease are recycled and decomposed.

STORMY WEATHER

Adverse weather conditions are another great recycler of trees. BTP identifies trees that may look structurally sound but are in fact dangerous, decayed, and susceptible to the high winds, ice storms, and hurricanes that occur in New England every three to five years. An apparently healthy tree may have a rotted anchorage system, be hollow through the core, and have improper crotch formations while its branches are endangering people and property. Part of BTP's mission is to determine if a tree is a threat before damage can occur.

PLANT A SEED

Wild recommends that people plant trees. For many reasons, trees tend to grow better as seedlings. A transplanted tree with a severed root system suffers from stress that will most likely be exacerbated by lack of water, fertilizers, and proper soil conditions. A seedling tends to thrive and grow on its merry way.

Many organizations in alliance with BTP will help people with planting trees. American Forest is the largest non-profit nature conservancy organization in the world. Under its umbrella is the Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, and Global ReLeaf whose Famous and Historic Tree Program collects seeds from famous trees; one of their programs offers seeds from the trees of Presidents.

Clara Barton's Redbud, John James Audubon's Sycamore, Edgar Allen Poe's Hackberry, and Alex Haley's Silver Maple have all contributed seeds that are available, along with other benefits, for \$35 by calling 1 (800) 320-8733 or, by fax, 1 (800) 264-6869, 8-5 P.M., Monday through Friday. ♦

BUILDING CHESTER SQUARE

Chester Square was the centerpiece of a very ambitious landscape vision on the part of the city of Boston. The first plan of Chester Square, drawn up in 1850 by Ezra Lincoln, engineer, showed a large 400 ft. x 164 ft. oval superimposed onto the 75-ft.-wide Chester Street (which was laid out in 1826 from Washington Street west to Tremont Street). Running down the middle of Chester Street from both ends of the Square to Tremont and Washington Streets was a 20-ft. mall with a double row of trees. This mall pre-dated the more famous Commonwealth Avenue, a much wider street with a tree-lined mall laid out by the commonwealth in 1857.

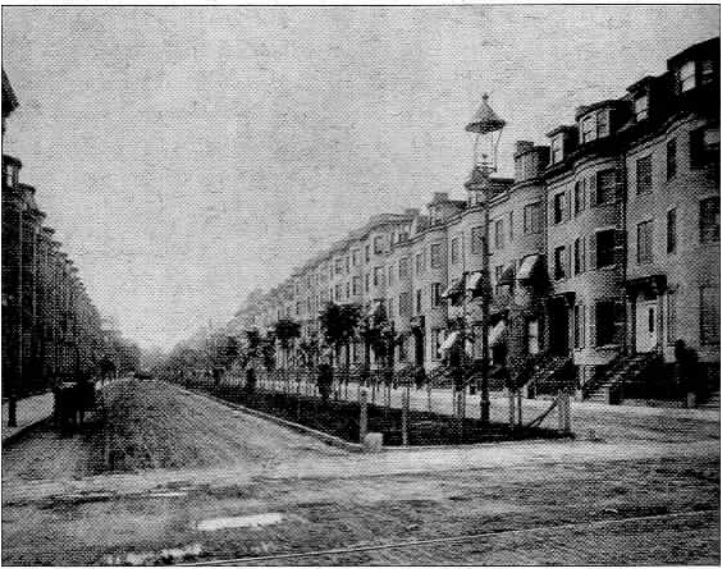
Spurred on by the prospect of selling house lots in this still undeveloped section of the South End, the city lost no time in enhancing the area. The 1850 Plan notes that Chester Square and Street are to be improved by the city with trees, fences, and walks by January 1852. In 1851 the city reported the expenses for filling Chester Street and Square, installing curbing, paving sidewalks, and furnishing Chester Square with a fence, fountain, and trees.

According to the 1852 *Almanac*, Chester Square had a 987-ft. iron fence, which cost \$4,000, and a fountain, which cost \$1,000. The fence was identical to the lotus-style fence found in Louisburg Square with lanterns extending from some of the pickets. The large three-tiered cast-iron fountain was set in a large 50 ft. basin. In 1853 the city watered the trees, cut the grass, and took care of the grounds of the Square. There was a flagpole erected in 1861, adorned with a gilt eagle.

CHESTER PARK EVOLVES

Having completed the landscaping of Chester Square, the city continued the tree-lined mall along Chester Street from Albany Street to what would eventually be Columbus Avenue. In 1858 the name of Chester Street from South Bay to the Boston Water Power Company's land was changed to Chester Park, with the part of Chester Park between Shawmut Avenue and Tremont Street named Chester Square. Through 1870 different sections of Chester Park were given a variety of names. An 1858 engraving depicts West Chester Park west of Tremont Street. An 1863 map shows a double row of trees running along East Chester Park from Harrison Avenue to Albany Street, even though there are still no house lots.

A photo circa 1890s (shown above) gives a view of Chester Park between Harrison Avenue and Washington Street. The small size of the trees on the mall may be due to the fact that they are a second planting. While East and West Chester parks were tree-lined and attractive, Chester Square in this period also continued to serve as a popular place for passive recreation. In 1878 *Boston Illustrated* noted that the Square had trees and flowers, with a fountain and a fish pond,



Chester Park between Harrison Ave. and Washington St., circa 1888
photo: The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities

“making the park a deliciously cool and pleasant spot in mid-summer.” In 1885 *King's Handbook of Boston* mentioned that the Square was “much frequented by the pretty children and trim nursery-maids of the neighborhood.”

NAMING THE AVENUE

In 1894 the names of East Chester Park, Chester Park, Chester Square, and West Chester Park were changed to Massachusetts Avenue. This name change may have marked the beginning of the decline of the area. The 1913 Topographical Map of Massachusetts Avenue, drawn by the Olmsted Brothers for the city's Public Grounds Department, included all of Massachusetts Avenue from Albany Street to Columbus Avenue. This plan is a useful benchmark for tracing the evolution of the landscape, as it depicted both the form and the existing tree population of what had formerly been known as Chester Square and Chester Park.

The dimensions as well as the earlier layout of straight and curvilinear paths in the Square remained the same. There was an existing fence, similar in style to the current fence around Union Park, but this was not the original fence. Both the fountain and flagpole were still in place. Only 27 trees remained in this large park, but there were still many street trees outside the fence. A single row of trees, some very small elms, and some slightly larger unidentified trees extended along the 20-ft. mall from Columbus Avenue to Albany Street. These trees were obviously replacements for the original double row of elms.

HEART OF THE PARK

In 1952 the landscape form of Chester Square was drastically altered as the city cut out the heart of the park to make room for six lanes of commuter traffic coming into the city from the newly constructed Southeast Expressway.

The 20 ft. mall extending from either end of the Square along Massachusetts Avenue was reduced to a 10-ft. median

strip. That Chester Square may have greatly deteriorated by 1952 was no excuse for the city to destroy a landscape of such historic significance.

The former curvilinear layout of the paths no longer existed in 1952, and only straight asphalt paths remained. The fountain was still there. The iron fence pictured on the 1913 map was still standing, and there were about 20 benches scattered about the park, some along the straight paths. The tree population had been substantially reduced since 1913, with only seven elms and three maples remaining within the park, and no street trees remaining outside the fence.

Shortly after the destruction of Chester Square and the creation of two narrow parks in its place, the Boston Park Department prepared a landscape plan consisting of maple trees, shrubs, flowers, park benches, and a 4-ft. chain link fence. All that remains today from this plan are seven large maple trees. Sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s oak trees were planted, and a 3-ft. black steel fence and unattractive "lollipop" lighting fixtures were added to each park. The median strip now contains cone-shaped brick planters, many of which are broken and contain dying trees.

CHESTER SQUARE REVISITED

Compared with the South End's four other residential squares, which have all undergone partial or complete restoration, Chester Square currently consists of two narrow parks, each in a state of great neglect. What was formerly a grand boulevard with a beautiful residential square at its center is now a six-lane traffic wasteland. But those residents who have taken the place of the earliest burghers of Chester Square have pledged to restore historic Chester Square.

In 1993 the Chester Park Neighborhood Association was



Panorama of Chester Square looking north toward Back Bay
photo: The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities

instrumental in persuading the city to include the following language in the BRA's South End/Lower Roxbury Development Policy Plan:

Further study of the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor should consider the restoration and unification of both sides of Chester Park which could serve as a land bridge connecting Lower Roxbury and the South End and further increase the amount of usable attractive open space in this community.

PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

In recent months the Massachusetts Avenue Task Force, consisting of representatives from every neighborhood association abutting Massachusetts Avenue, has presented a series of proposals for the redesign of the avenue to the consultants working on the project. Included among these proposals is a request to restore Chester Square by putting Massachusetts Avenue underground, at least between Tremont and Shawmut.

Funding for such a project has been identified in a federal initiative for historic preservation and restoration in conjunction with surface transportation improvements, called ISTEA Enhancement. Mayor Menino has been formally asked to apply for these funds, and support for the project has been received from Senator William Bulger, Representative Byron Rushing, The South End Historical Society, and City Council President James Kelly as well as from a number of city neighborhood organizations inside and outside the South End.

It is entirely appropriate that the restoration of Chester Square be considered as part of the redesign of Massachusetts Avenue. Massachusetts Avenue between Columbus Avenue and Harrison Avenue still retains its historic residential architecture and character, and the city now has a unique opportunity to restore Chester Square and this portion of Massachusetts Avenue to its former glory. Representative Byron Rushing has asked the city's Engineering Department to look into the cost of submerging Massachusetts Avenue and to make a presentation to the community on how the entrances to the underpass would look, and where they would be.

At the recent annual meeting of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Boston, Rushing cited Chester Square as an example of an urban planning mistake which has the potential to be reversed. According to Rushing: "You can't put back something like the West End, which has been totally obliterated. But you can restore something which has been only partially destroyed. As the West End was demolished, Chester Square was scarred because of the combination of arrogant planning and disenfranchised men, women, and children. In this case preservation is not enough; restoration must be seriously considered." ♦

Phebe Goodman, a landscape designer, is the administrator of the Friends of Copley Square.

Two Hundred Conferees Enjoyed Evening House Tour in South End

By ERIC DRAY

IN LATE OCTOBER, Boston hosted the 48th annual National Trust for Historic Preservation Conference. Attending one of the most popular National Trust conferences in history, 2500 preservation professionals gathered from around the country at the Park Plaza Hotel for four days of lectures, workshops, and local and regional tours.

The theme of this year's conference was "Preservation, Economics, and Community Rebirth," focussing on preservation's role in building and sustaining healthy economies in communities of all sizes. National Trust President Richard Moe considered Boston an ideal setting for this year's theme, calling Boston one of the country's most historic cities and a leader and innovator in the preservation of buildings and neighborhoods as vital components of urban life.

Mayor Thomas Menino, a National Trust advisor, discussed Boston's preservation past and future in a speech given during the opening Plenary Session at the Wang Center. Mayor Menino used this occasion to announce new preservation initiatives such as the adoption of a city-wide Demolition Delay Ordinance. This ordinance will require a 90-day delay period for issuance of demolition permits for

historic buildings not already designated as local landmarks. The mayor also spoke of the need to revitalize the city's major thoroughfares and bring abandoned city-owned historic buildings back to life, an initiative that should bode well for Washington Street, and the Allen and Porter Houses.

Two hundred conferees enjoyed an evening house tour of the South End entitled, "Inside the South End," which included a tour of a number of residences and the adaptive reuse of two South End row houses for a stained glass studio and a show room for antiques and products for restoration. The tour was followed by a reception in the Mills Gallery where the Society tour guides and National Trust guests were able to share ideas.

In addition, an urban preservation commission workshop based upon the South End Landmark District was organized for 40 people from 20 states following a trolley tour of the South End. During the tour John Neale, historian of The South End Historical Society, highlighted difficult issues confronting the commission such as handicap access, brownstone painting, and the Alexandra Hotel.

A panel discussion was hosted by Susan Hartnett at the Boston Center for the Arts. Pauline Chase Harrell, the commission's first chair, and Arthur Howe talked about the early history of preservation in the South End and why the district was created in 1985. Randi Lathrop, president of the Blackstone/Franklin Neighborhood Association, discussed the need to cultivate a positive relationship

Continued on next page

Calendar

First Tuesday of every month:

SOUTH END LANDMARKS COMMISSION
Room 801, Boston City Hall
4 pm; public invited
For more information, call (617) 635-3850

Second Thursday of every month:

THE SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Board Meeting — Francis Dane House
532 Massachusetts Avenue
7:45 pm

May 7, 1994 – April, 1995

DOWN WASHINGTON STREET: VISIONS OF PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE
Old State House Museum

COMING EVENTS:

JANUARY 1995

Thursday, January 5 7:45 P.M.

TWELFTH NIGHT GATHERING AND RECEPTION FOR NEW MEMBERS
The Francis Dane House
532 Massachusetts Avenue
Members — free; Guests — \$5 each.

WINTER PROGRAM

SQUARES OF THE SOUTH END
Phebe S. Goodman
Friends of Copley Square
The Francis Dane House
Date and time to be announced

MARCH 1995

Saturday, March 18; Sunday, March 19
11 A.M. — 6 P.M.
CYCLORAMA FLEA MARKET OF ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES — Over 100 dealers
Cyclorama, Boston Center for the Arts
539 Tremont Street, Boston
Admission: \$5; \$4 with coupon
For more information, call 536-4445

APRIL 1995

Saturday, April 29
THE SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY BALL
Boston Ballet, 19 Clarendon Street
Ticket information to be announced

NEWS • AND • EVENTS

(Continued from Page 6)

between neighborhood associations and the commission in order to achieve common goals, citing the recent success of the Shawmut Avenue reconstruction with brick sidewalks and Acorn lights. Susan Hartnett, as president of the Boston Center for the Arts, discussed the benefits and challenges of operating within a landmark district as an institutional resident. Current South End Landmark District Commissioners Nancy Wilson and Alan Schwartz completed the panel discussion by focussing on the importance of community participation and the need to educate the community about the importance of preservation and the protection a landmark district provides to a neighborhood like the South End. ♦

House Tour Is a Huge Success

BY NANCY PARKER WILSON

T SOUTH END HOUSE Tour held in October was a resounding success. Taking place just off Washington Street, it concentrated on Blackstone Park, Shawmut Avenue, and Haven Street. The beautiful homes on the tour generated much enthusiasm for the tour and the area. The South End Burial Ground and the traveling exhibit, Down Washington Street: Visions of the Past, Present, and Future, at the South End Branch of the Boston Public Library were very well received as was the exhibit by Alan Colby at the Franklin House. Mayor Menino visited some of the sights and remarked how beautiful everything looked.

The success of the tour is due to the involvement of the Blackstone/Franklin Square Neighborhood Association. Randi Lathrop and Mary Grant Price spent many hours assuring that the streets, park, and cemetery were in order. Brian Davidson and Randi Rae Martin gave tours of Blackstone Park and Franklin Square, and the Parks Department also gave interesting tours of the site. Many thanks are due to the people whose houses were on the tour. The event sparkled thanks to them. ♦

❖New Members❖

Joan and Jim Cox
Warren C. Curtis
Nancy Forsyth and Robin
Baliszewski
Jeanne Galich and Steve
Pellitier
Barbara Hanley and Lee
Brooks
Ginny and Dennis Jenkins
Mary Kelleher

Mark Kenny
Jonathan Kosow
Janet Dracksdorf Mills
Nicholas Pepe, M.D. and
Sandy Stephens, M.D.
Patience Sampson and Robert
Stafford
Kevin P. Shale II
Peter Stone
Laura Weinrebe



John Neale and Mr. and Mrs. Austin T. Gray, lenders to Down Washington Street Exhibition.

Down Washington Street Exhibition Tours the South End Neighborhood

BY KIMBERLY ALEXANDER SHILLAND

IN OCTOBER, a smaller traveling version of the exhibition Down Washington Street: Visions of Past, Present, and Future, opened at its first neighborhood venue, the South End Branch Library on Tremont Street. (The complete version of the show is on view at the Old State House until late April 1995. It is a collaborative project of The South End Historical Society and The Bostonian Society.) We are working with a number of organizations and hope the exhibition will travel to numerous South End sites, possibly United South End Settlements, University Hospital, Cathedral Housing and/or School, Franklin Square House, Jorge Hernandez Cultural Center, and the BCA,



Kimberly Alexander Shilland, curator of The SEHS, opening Down Washington Street Exhibit

among others. The exhibition is mounted on panels and includes approximately 60 items, reproduced from the larger show. A children's activity sheet will be available at the neighborhood locations. The exhibit text is in English, Spanish, and Chinese. ♦

City Allocates Substantial Funds to Stabilize Allen & Porter Houses

BY DAN SUGARMAN AND
JOHN NEALE

AT A SPECIAL neighborhood hearing on November 2 at Boston City Hospital called by City Councilors James Kelly and Richard Iannella, it was announced that the city has finally allocated at least \$500,000 in emergency funds to stabilize the landmark Allen and Porter houses. Built in 1859, the Allen house is the most elaborate



Allen House
photo: James Roche

Victorian mansion remaining in the South End, and the Porter houses are the oldest structures in the neighborhood as well as among the oldest in Boston, dating to 1806.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) took over both important buildings during the 1960s and 1970s and has been unable to attract a developer since then due to the severe physical deterioration that both houses have suffered. During the last ten years a number of potential developers have tried unsuccessfully to make financial sense of the buildings for a variety of uses, but the cost of renovation has been prohibitive. As a result, they have remained boarded up, suffering from fires, vandalism, and water damage.

The South End Historical Society, the South End Landmark District Commission, and neighborhood groups have been pushing the city for many years to take decisive action to stabilize the buildings and find developers for them. The South End Landmark District Commission has

recently held a series of special hearings on the buildings, which ended with the city agreeing to pay for a thorough structural analysis.

The BRA's new Director Marisa Lago was so alarmed by the resulting report that she immediately ordered the sidewalks around the buildings to have protected walkways constructed on them to prevent falling debris from striking passers-by. The report concluded that the Allen and Porter houses were in imminent danger of collapsing under their own weight and that they would not survive another winter in their current unprotected state. The goal of stabilization will be to protect the buildings permanently from further deterioration and to bring them up to a level of finish which will allow developers or other interested parties to view the buildings as financially viable.

At an emergency meeting of the South End Landmark District Commission held on November 29, the BRA presented a series of schemes for the stabilization project, recommending one that will cost an estimated \$575,699. This scheme includes restructuring the interiors, shoring up the exterior façades, and constructing new roofs and interior floors. Contracts on each of the buildings will be put out to bid during the first half of December with a January deadline for responses. The actual work is expected to take three to four months, starting as soon as the contract is awarded.

The BRA agreed to pursue preservation of as much of the original interior fabric of the two buildings as possible, with assistance having been offered by Kimberly Shilland, president of the Society of Architectural Historians, New England Chapter. Her organization would document the buildings with the aid of the North Bennet Street School, removing and storing as much interior woodwork and hardware as possible. Antonia Pollak, executive director of the Boston Preservation Alliance, also suggested that the Massachusetts Historic Commission might be able to offer as much as \$100,000 in additional funding. ♦

Annual Dues are due January 1995.



The South End Historical Society

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