



The South End Historical Society NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402 — Vol. 24 No. 3, Autumn 1995

Looking Forward to the House Tour

BY LEE DUNN

THE 27TH SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY HOUSE TOUR will be held Saturday, October 21 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This year's tour will feature the interiors of homes on Dwight, Ringgold, Bradford and Union Park, to name a few, with gardens and community parks interspersed along the way. Highlights of the public buildings on tour will be the beautiful Holy Cross Cathedral and its newly restored chapel; St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church; portions of the Boston Center for the Arts, including an exciting exhibit in the Mills Gallery, and the ever-popular costume shop of the Boston Ballet. Also included will be the Franklin Institute, which has never appeared on an SEHS tour.

We are grateful to have so many wonderful South End friends and neighbors who have graciously consented to share their homes with the Boston community. The funds raised from the annual tour allow The South End Historical Society to continue to develop interesting programs for its membership and the general public as well as to promote the preservation of this historic neighborhood.

continued on page 7

CYCLO RAMA

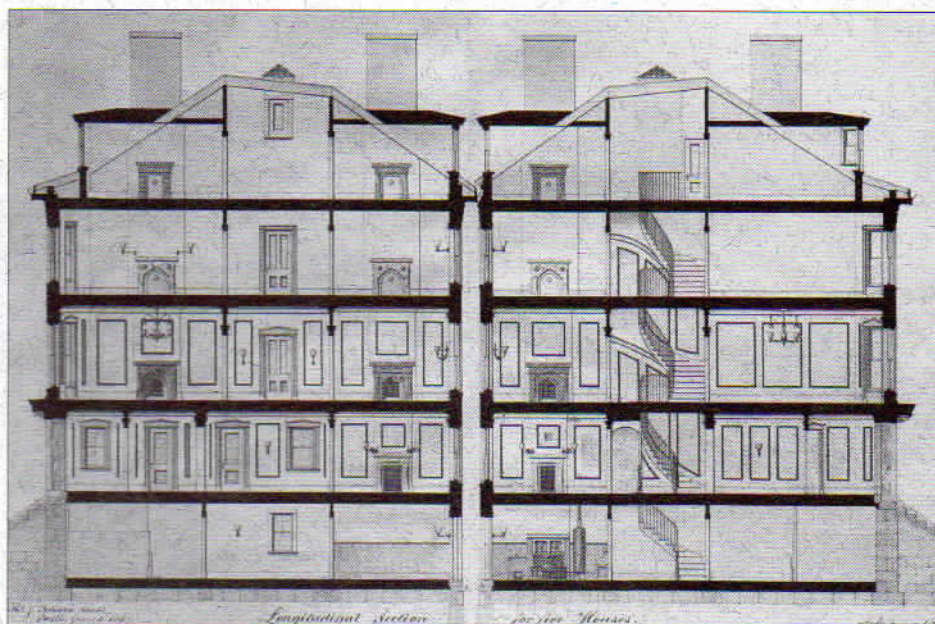
FLEA MARKET

**BOSTON CENTER
FOR THE ARTS**

NOVEMBER 18 & 19
SATURDAY, 11 AM TO 6 PM
& SUNDAY, 11 AM TO 6 PM
\$5/\$4 WITH COUPON

INSIDE

Washington Street Major Planning Effort Begins	2
532 Massachusetts Avenue Continuing the Work	3
Members' Programs Schedule is Taking Shape	4
Couple in Search Of a House Tour	4
In Memory Of Calendar	6
New Members	7
Adopt a Tree	8



Longitudinal View of Five Houses, 902-910 Washington Street
drawing: by N.J. Bradlee, architect, 1857; courtesy of The Boston Athenaeum

Major Planning Effort Begins for Washington Street

THE BOSTON SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTS announces the first meeting of a major planning event that will focus on the future of Washington Street and the neighborhoods along its route. Nationally known urban designer Rebecca Barnes, AIA, will lead several hundred citizens, business owners, public agencies, architects and urban planners next spring in a three-day public charrette or brainstorming session. It is expected that the charrette will draw attention to the needs of the residents and business owners along Washington Street and will result in suggestions for the future development of the area from Downtown Crossing to Jamaica Plain.

In the past 10 years, the Boston Society of Architects has planned and implemented other design efforts such as this including Boston Visions, a national ideas competition; a redevelopment proposal for the Metropolitan State Hospital; community plans for the re-use of Fort Devens; and, most recently, Boston Harbor Visions, a collaborative effort to look at the future of the Harbor.

The future of Washington Street and the issues of this charrette (public planning exercise) are complex due to the richness of the urban fabric that constitutes this oldest spoke of the Hub. Washington Street connects a series of unique and

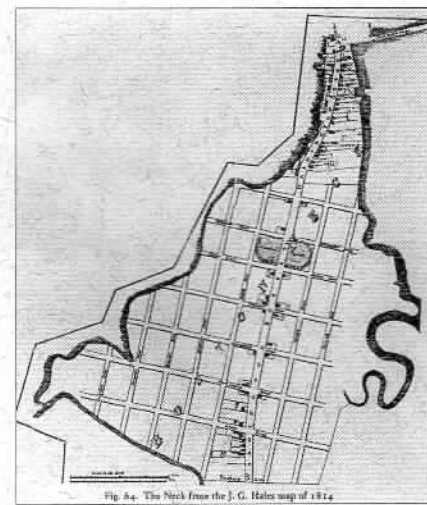
distinct neighborhoods and users from the city's edge (at Forest Hills) to its center (at Downtown Crossing). The street as the public domain is both actually and metaphysically the tie that binds the districts into a slice of Boston.

Several questions for these neighborhoods include:

1. What of the district's character is expressed on Washington Street now?
2. What does Washington Street contribute (or could) to the health of the area?
3. How could improvements on Washington Street help promote or advise the neighborhood's vision of its future?
4. How does the city's vision of itself play out in the physical development of Washington Street and adjacent areas?

Neighborhood organizations, business owners, community groups, retail associations, citizen groups, and everyone with an interest in the Washington Street corridor and its future were to attend the first open meeting on Wednesday, September 20, 1995.

Kimberly Shilland, curator of The South End Historical Society and of the exhibit, *Down Washington Street: Visions of Past, Present and Future*, is one of the participants in the charrette. We will be writing more about this event as it progresses.✧



The Neck and Washington Street
drawing: J. G. Hales map of 1814



Washington Street Elevated from Franklin Square House in the South End
with View of Northampton Station

photo: Leslie Jones, May 26, 1931; courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department

Continuing the Work at 532 Massachusetts Avenue

BY STEPHEN GREENE

THOUGH IT HARDLY seems like it, three years have passed since I last wrote an article for the newsletter. We may have been quiet, but we have been making progress.

A little news about our new Second Vice-President Karen Parker, who will be taking charge of the house. As you will see, we have plans that will benefit both the house and others in the South End who are doing exterior iron and brownstone restoration. Karen and her committee have some exciting plans and challenges.

A brief recap of what we have accomplished in the past three years:

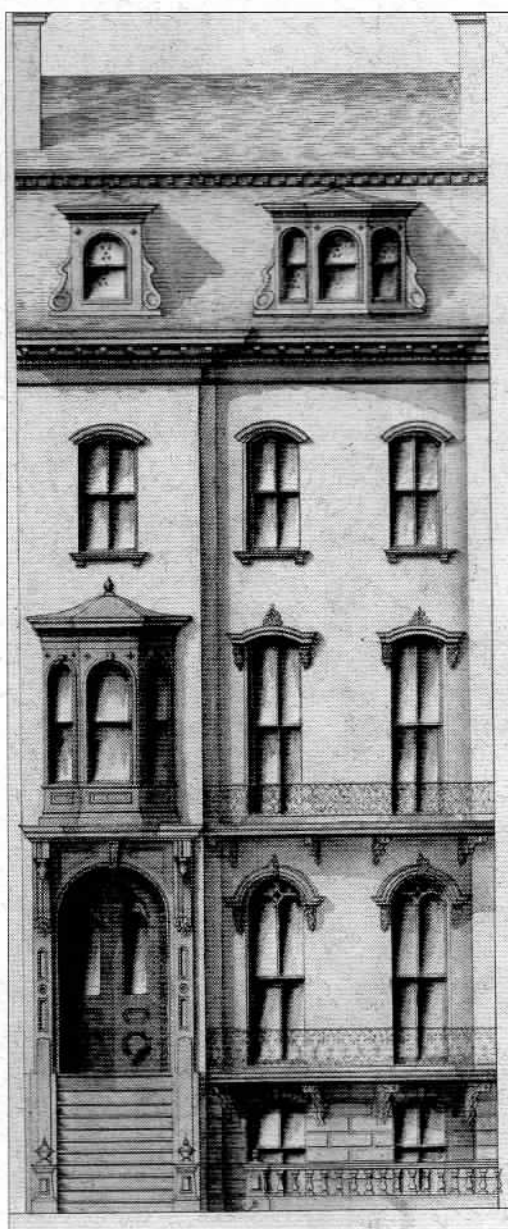
You may remember that back in 1992 we attempted to remortgage the building to free up money for much of the work that needed to be done. Changes in the banking industry made remortgaging close to impossible. As a non-profit organization, board members would have had to be personally liable for the mortgage. Not very workable for a volunteer position! This forced us to change our work schedule. Rather than major, large-scale and big-budget projects, we have to work with the money available each year from the society's fundraising efforts. Our work has been limited to affordable projects when money and time allowed.

Prior to 1992 we did the main roof. The next project was the roof of the first-floor extension. Like the main roof, a membrane roof was installed with the edge flashing in copper. A wrought iron railing was saved and may be used as part of the rear yard and shed railing.

Though it did not seem like a large project, the hall and stairs were painted and carpeted with considerable effort. Foot traffic has been significantly quieted with the runner.

The front doors and exterior wood were stripped, sanded and oiled. Again, this was another large task and had a bit of an adventure associated with it when we ran out of Watco oil. After calling numerous suppliers we finally found a can that had even more dust on it than some of our artifacts.

We had some unexpected plumbing problems which have



Paul D. Wallis house, 534 Massachusetts Avenue
Identical to Society's house next door at 532
drawing: Luther Briggs, courtesy of SPNEA

been repaired but left significant carpentry work to be done in the basement. The front yard, though still without the cast-iron railing, has been planted. The railing is still in the planning stages as it is a major expense of possibly \$15,000.

The rear yard has been cleared and stairs installed for access to West Springfield Street after many years of debris were removed.

We have made steady progress but still have much to do. Karen Parker and Eben Kunz are creating a long-term building management plan (BMP). What is exciting about this work is that we may be able to accomplish the restoration of our cast-iron railings and brownstone with the creation of models, molds, patterns and techniques that others will be able to use for their South End restoration projects. We are hopeful that we will receive some restoration grants to accomplish this. Please let us know if you would be interested in replicated iron or brownstone work that meets your architectural needs and your budget.

We have a lot of exciting work still to do on our building and certainly could use, and will greatly appreciate, your help if you are interested in joining us.

Our next issue of the newsletter will go into more detail about the BMP.

Please call Fran Duffy at 536-4445 and join us in these projects. ✦

This newsletter is published by The South End Historical Society, Inc., 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA, 02118; office telephone (617) 536-4445. The opinions expressed by the contributors are not necessarily those of The Historical Society. Every effort will be made to return unsolicited manuscripts submitted for possible publication if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Those interested in printing articles must obtain written permission from the editor. ©Copyright, 1995, The South End Historical Society, Inc.

Receipt of *The SEHS Newsletter* is a privilege of membership in The Historical Society, an association of people interested in the recognition and preservation of historic resources in, and recording the history of, the South End of Boston. Individual membership is \$15 per year; family and dual memberships are \$25.

Officers: Stephen Greene, President	E. Domurad, Editing & Design
Susan Park, Treasurer	Daniel Sugarman, Communications
Barbara Anderson, Secretary	& Publications Committee Chair

Schedule for Members' Programs Is Taking Shape

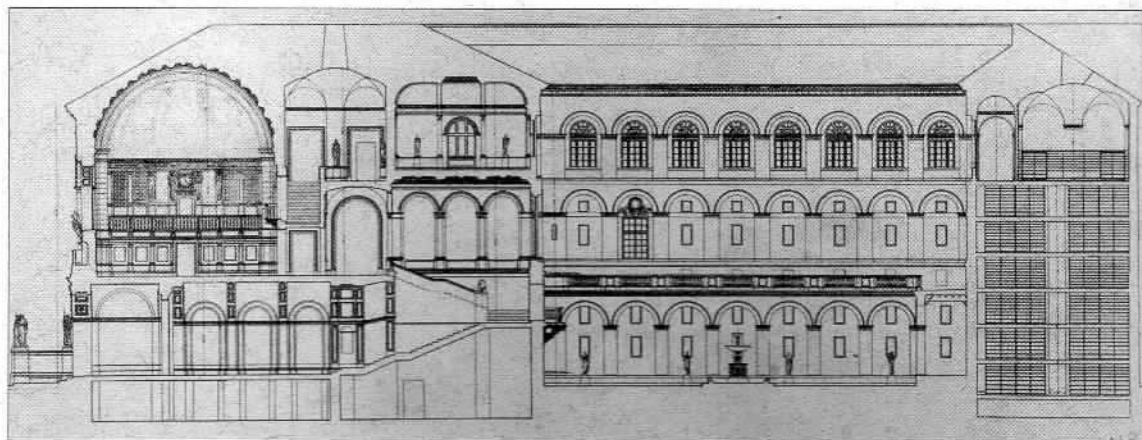
BY JOHN PILTZECKER

FALL MARKS THE beginning of a new series of members' programs at The South End Historical Society. This year's slate of programs, which is still taking shape, will provide both our new and longtime members with an opportunity to discover something that they may not have known about the South End. Most members' programs begin at 7:45 p.m. at the headquarters of the historical society, 532 Massachusetts Avenue. All of the programs are followed by an informal reception where new members are welcomed and participants can talk with our speakers and program presenters.

Our new series began on September 28 with a well-attended program presented by The South End Historical Society Historian John Neale on The Architectural Styles of South End Row Houses: From Federal to Queen Anne.

In October, just in time for Halloween, we invite you to a program presented by Beth Shepard, project director for Boston's Historic Burying Ground Initiative. Beth will share the history of the South End Burying Ground on Washington Street, which was established in 1814.

Another program scheduled for the upcoming season is a talk on the history of the Children's Art Center on Rutland Street, the process of restoring it and how, by using the original plans, the architects created their designs for the restoration.



Architectural cross-section drawing of Boston Public Library
drawing: McKim, Mead and White, circa 1887
courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department



As a special treat this year, we are planning a field trip to the recently restored McKim, Mead and White Boston Public Library where we will have an opportunity to take a closer look at the recent recasting of Frederick McMonie's bronze statue Baccante With Infant Faun. The original statue, installed in 1896 as a memorial to Julia Appleton McKim, was rejected by a committee of proper Bostonians who declared it unsuitable for the library as they thought it celebrated intemperance. Angered by the rejection of the statue, donors withdrew the gift and gave it to New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Now, nearly one hundred years later, the Baccante With Infant Faun has returned to the newly restored library.

Some other programs in the planning stages include talks on South End ironwork, the industrial district of the South End, and a holiday season wine-tasting reception hosted by a South End wine merchant. Of course, we will have our popular First Night Gathering and Reception for new members in January. All of the upcoming programs will be announced by a special mailing to SEHS members. We look forward to seeing you at our programs this year.

Couple In Search of a House Tour

BY HAROLD B. JOHNSON II

"The South End?" she asked hesitantly.

"Yeah, you know... behind Copley," I answered intelligently.

"Oh... you mean like Roxbury?"

"No, no. Roxbury is blocks away. Come on, let's check it out."

So went the sophisticated, well-informed conversation that managed to convince my fiancée to join me on a quest for "open houses" in a mysterious part of Boston that we two Allstonians had only heard mentioned in vague references. How soon we would find out that just because a part of town isn't on the itinerary of a Duck Tour, doesn't imply that it won't hold treasures to be seen and experienced.

SUNDAY PARKING ON COLUMBUS AVENUE

CUT TO COLUMBUS Avenue, near the corner of Arlington, as seen through the wide eyes of a couple of tourists driving, surprisingly enough, through their hometown. The day being a Sunday, we were struck first by an astonishing sight: dozens of cars in the middle of the street. We blinked. No, those cars were not, in fact, making various left turns. They weren't even occupied! Where else but Boston would it be legal to park one's car right in the middle of a main thoroughfare? We knew that we had stumbled into what was proving to be a most intriguing neighborhood.

"So you want to park here?"

"No. We're headed for lunch at St. Botolph's. Let's try taking a right here. It looks on the map like it goes through."

Well, I had been wrong before, so it didn't really surprise either of us when that proved again to be true as we turned right onto Braddock Park (We would have had to negotiate a path over a couple of curbs and through the Southwest Corridor Park in order to reach the restaurant!). But neither of us was particularly interested in my lack of navigation skills right then, being too busy saying "Wow...."

THE SURREAL SOUND OF BIRDS

ROW HOUSES... THE WORLD before us teemed with those magnificent four-story, bow-front, Victorian red brick row houses, complete with wrought-iron railings, English gardens and stained glass and oak front doors, oozing elegance. After our initial amazement, the rest of the block began to take shape, and we noticed the rows of majestic trees, the brick sidewalks and the beautiful oval park, placed strategically right in the middle of the street.

And then, something more incredible... a sound; not police sirens or muffler-less 1978 Hondas or Trolley Tour guides but birds, chirping sweetly amidst the peace of this fabulous enclave we had stumbled upon. This was surreal. I stepped back and looked beyond our immediate surroundings.

Yes, there it was, the John Hancock building gleaming in all its ultramodern glory only a few blocks away. This was still 1995. This was still Boston and the heart of Boston at that.

I smiled; "Back Bay on qualudes" was my first thought. My fiancée grimaced; "These shoes are rubbing blisters into my ankles" was hers. But by then it was too late for compassion! We had sights to discover and houses to wander through, and we had to prepare our best "Certainly we can afford this home" face to present to the real estate agents we would meet.

AMBLERS WELCOME

BUT AS WE AMBLED (The South End seems to lend itself more to amblers than to power walkers) in the direction of St. Botolph's, I reminded myself that this had to be a fluke; we

must have gotten lucky and parked in the one block specially preserved for its turn-of-the-century charm, much in the same way that Acorn Street on Beacon Hill still uses mid-nineteenth century gas lamps for that nostalgia factor.

Cut to the corner of West Newton street. Having walked for hours (after scouting out three houses open for viewing and strolling through the Southwest Corridor), we paused to gaze around at what certainly deserves recognition as one of the 10 most lovely intersections in Boston. This had been no fluke; block after block spent in exploration had proven that. This is the way life should be—a true melting pot of faces, accents and especially speeds: a few power-walkers, obviously halfway between their last important meeting and their next, and a few ambling along much like the two of us, still more gathered on stairways chatting the afternoon away and all with an unmistakable air of contentment. Just like us. Yes, the South End, in the past two hours, had transformed itself in our minds from an unknown expanse of land to a neighborhood we hoped we would one day be calling home. And my fiancée's ankles somehow had stopped aching.

Sugar-coated fantasy? Overblown exaggeration of reality? I don't think so. The sensations that we felt as we wandered were certainly real enough. Instead of chuckling at cheesiness, grimacing at sordidness or staring in awe at majesty, we stood smiling at the elegant livability surrounding us. To us, that was the most important reality, and the one we carry around today...

Lunch hour has brought me frequently back to explore different parts of the South End over the past months, and never have I returned to work un-awed by yet another amazing sight or set of sights. The Ellis Neighborhood, Union Park, Dartmouth Square—all have caused me to stop in my tracks and simply stare. I must add that this reality of mine has been tempered by an underlying knowledge that all is not entirely wholesome. The eyesore of graffiti tagging persists in places, and decadence is always subtly threatening to rear its head, sadly succeeding along a few borderline streets, where boarded windows and empty storefronts reveal that there is definitely still work to be done. But even as my eyes fall across such a sight, I can't help but see the strength still evident in the melancholy buildings and the character and class of those around them, smell the blossoms on the trees, hear the tranquil blend of rustling leaves and twittering birds, and feel that these structures, and this neighborhood, are going to make it. ✦

"I was amazed a few months ago when I took my first walk through the South End at the beauty, vitality and livability of the neighborhood that I saw around me and hoped to capture some of that emotion as I described this part of town from the eyes of an outsider," writes one of our newest members to The South End Historical Society.

We are pleased to present Harold B. Johnson II's article to our membership.

In Memory Of

WE ARE SADDENED to report the death of the following longtime members of The South End Historical Society:

Julia Atkinson
formerly of St. Charles Street
Kenneth Grant Brandeberry
of West Brookline Street
Charles Mehegan
of Worcester Square

Calendar

First Tuesday of every month:

SOUTH END LANDMARKS COMMISSION
Room 801, Boston City Hall
4 p.m.; 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
7:00 p.m.

COMING EVENTS:

SEPTEMBER

Thursday, September 21–Friday, December 29

THE IMAGE OF BOSTON
Perception and Change
in the Modern City
Gelatin silver prints by
Nishan Bichajian, 1954–'57
and Peter Vanderwalker, 1995
The MIT Museum's
Compton Gallery
Building 10–150
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge
Gallery hours:
Monday–Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

OCTOBER

Saturday, October 21, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SOUTH END HOUSE TOUR
Sponsored by The South End Historical Society
Tour of Private Homes in Historic South End
Tickets: Tour and Sponsors' Party, \$35 person
Tour only, \$15 in advance; \$18 day of tour.
For information, call (617) 536-4445.

MEMBERS' PROGRAM

Just in time for Halloween!
Beth Shepard, project director
Boston's Historic Burying Ground Initiative
Will talk about the South End Burying Ground
On Washington Street.
DATE AND TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED.

NOVEMBER

Saturday, November 18,
11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Sunday, November 19,
11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

CYCLORAMA FLEAMARKET

OF
ANTIQUES
AND
COLLECTIBLES
Over 100
dealers
Boston
Center for
the Arts
539 Tremont
Street
Admission:
\$5; \$4
with coupon
For more
information,
call 536-4445.



Cyclorama Fleamarket



Heirlooms at the Cyclorama
Boston Center for the Arts

(Continued from Page 1)

Members are needed to help make the tour a success. If you can volunteer several hours on Saturday, October 21 to sit in one of the homes, please call Fran Duffly, The South End Historical Society at (617) 536-4445.

Ticket prices are \$15 in advance and \$18 the day of the tour. Tickets will be available at businesses in the South End or through The SEHS in advance. Tickets will be available the day of the tour at the Kiosk in front of the Boston Center for the Arts. For further information, call The South End Historical Society, (617) 536-4445.

Corporate Benefactors of the 1995 House Tour:

A.E. Rondeau Real Estate

Donahue & Grolman, Attorneys and Counsellors at Law

New Members

Mr. & Mrs. Mark Baranski

James R. Davis

Harold Johnson

Helen Jones

James Nagle

Mary Riffe & Robert Hiss

Andrew Saxe

Matt Sutton

Karen Tenney & Thomas Loring

Alice Verhoeven

*Welcome
&
Greet A New Neighbor
with a Membership
To The SEHS*

BECOME A PART of the effort to preserve the South End, one of Boston's most unique and important neighborhoods, by joining The South End Historical Society. Your dollars and membership will help us achieve our objective of preserving the physical fabric and interpreting the history of the South End for present and future generations.

Newsletters, publications, programs, tours and numerous other activities are all part of The South End Historical Society. We hope you will support our neighborhood by joining our society and becoming part of these activities.

name or
names _____

address _____

zip _____

telephone _____

full-time student..... \$10.00 _____

individual \$15.00 _____

family/dual \$25.00 _____

patron..... \$75.00 _____

life (indiv.)..... \$300.00 _____

additional

contribution..... \$25.00 _____

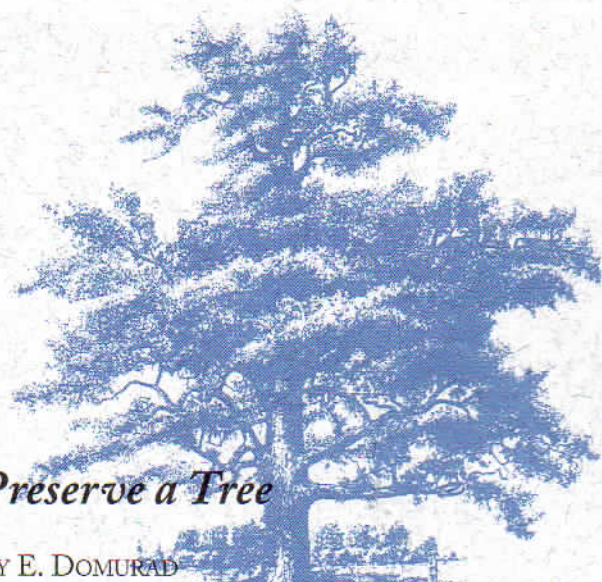
..... \$50.00 _____

..... \$100.00 _____

total\$ _____

Please make checks payable to The South End Historical Society, 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118.

All contributions are tax deductible.



Preserve a Tree

By E. DOMURAD

IF FALL CAME EARLY to your street, as it did to mine, leaves arrived on some of the trees only to turn brown in June and July. The tree in front of my house is not an old tree. I remember when the city planted it and how long another dead tree had stood there before the city put in a replacement.

In the Winter 1994 issue of *The SEHS Newsletter* we introduced our readers to Arborist Peter Wild who believes that trees can and should be preserved just as buildings are, hence the name of his company — Boston Tree

Preservation. Architect and architectural critic Robert Campbell recalled, when he spoke to The SEHS this summer, the South End of the 1950s as a “treeless, dry, dusty, and unpleasant place.”

Without proper soil care and sufficient water even the young trees planted within the last decade will not survive. Trees should last forever but soil compaction and lack of moisture will eventually make any tree another victim of environmental stress.

I called Wild, and he stopped by to assess the withered maple in front of the house. He said the tree was suffering from scorch, a term that translates into lack of water and vitamins. The following week a plant health care program for the tree arrived in the mail. Boston Tree Preservation recommended a summer, fall and spring fertilization program to promote healthy foliage and roots as well as soil aeration. The fertilization program would inhibit insect pests that are attracted to weak plants until we could restore the tree's vitality. We also talked about beginning a watering program for the tree.

When you see a tree in trouble, organize your neighbors to rally around failing trees that need help to survive city living. Boston Tree Preservation also sets aside a percentage of profits to offer scholarship programs for trees that no one can afford to maintain. Boston Tree Preservation is located at 2 Draper Street, Woburn, MA 01801, telephone (800) 974-TREE. +

Have you paid your 1995 dues yet?



The South End Historical Society

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402

Address Correction Requested

U. S. Postage
Non-Profit Org.

PAID

PERMIT NO.

50197

BOSTON

MA