



The South End Historical Society NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402 — Vol. 24 No. 2, Summer 1995

New Officers Elected

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING of The South End Historical Society, held June 8 at the New Hope Baptist Church, the following slate of officers and directors was elected:

President: Stephen Greene

652 Massachusetts Avenue 02118

First Vice President: L. Fernando

Requena, 55 East Concord

Street 02118

Second Vice President: Karen Parker,

136 West Concord Street 02118

Secretary: Barbara Anderson,

27 Appleton Street 02116

Membership Committee Chairman:

Susan Hamilton, 150 Dartmouth

Street 02116

Fund-Raising Committee Chairman:

Lee Dunn, 46 Dartmouth

Street 02116

Community Relations Committee

Chairman: Michael Baenen,

146 West Concord Street 02118

Meetings and Functions Committee

Chairman: John Piltzecker,

12 Yarmouth Street 02116

Director-at-large: Arthur F. Howe,

81 Montgomery Street 02116

Assistant Treasurer: Conrad Agneta,

77 Waltham Street 02118 for a one-

year term. ♦

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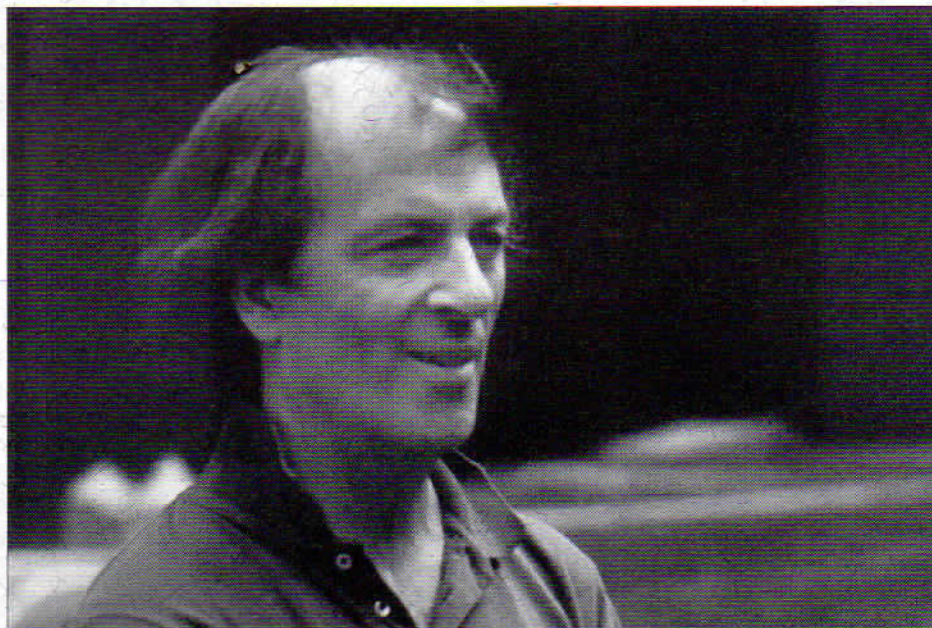
Architect's Impressions of the South End: Robert Campbell Addresses the Society's Annual Meeting

By E. Domurad

BY THE INVITATION OF ARTHUR F. HOWE, president of The South End Historical Society, Robert Campbell spoke informally to the members of the society at their annual meeting, held in the New Hope Baptist Church. Campbell is a practicing architect in Cambridge, Massachusetts and a writer on architecture. He is architecture critic of the *Boston Globe*, has published more than 70 feature articles in national periodicals, and is currently a contributing editor of the magazine *Architectural Record*. Of his most recent book, *Cityscapes of Boston: An American City Through Time*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* wrote: "Campbell is esteemed by many to be the leading architectural critic in America today." The *Chicago Tribune* said the book "belongs on the bookshelf of anyone who cares about the fate of the American city." In 1980, he received the medal for architectural criticism of the American Institute of Architects.

With apologies to people in the audience who were steeped in the architecture and history of the South End, Campbell began his informal reminiscences of

continued on page 4



Robert Campbell, architect and writer on architecture

Signs of Life Appearing on Washington Street

BY E. DOMURAD

THE Porter Houses on Washington Street have been stabilized for future development. The houses burned three days after the exhibit *Down Washington Street: Visions of the Past, Present, and Future*, opened at the Old State House Museum on May 20, 1994. The catalogue for the show (call SEHS at 536-4445 to get a copy) tells us that William Porter (1743-1813) owned a distillery on Orange Street when he decided to build a pair of houses on Boston Neck at the corner of Washington and East Springfield Streets for himself and his son. Most of the undeveloped land on the Neck was owned by the town. Porter's deed contained some of the earliest recorded covenants governing height, setbacks, and use. The attached houses, completed by 1806, were mirror images of each other, with a wooden balustrade around the roof and entrances on opposite sides giving the impression of one large house. The oldest remaining houses in the South End, they are distinguished from their Victorian neighbors by Federal features such as Flemish bond brickwork and small squarish top floor windows. The houses have been abandoned since the late 1960s (when they were used as a bar) and are now owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA).

PRESERVATION IN ACTION

After the fire, this rare survivor of the nineteenth century became the focus of a concentrated effort by the city and neighborhood organizations to stabilize the building for future development. Alan Schwartz, Chairman of the Landmarks Commission, and South End Landmark District Commissioners John Neale and Nancy Parker Wilson, along with Richard Bertman, CBT, and Paula Plante, have worked with city officials and Mayor Thomas M. Menino, BRA Director Marisa Lago, City Council President James Kelly, and Councillor Richard Iannella.

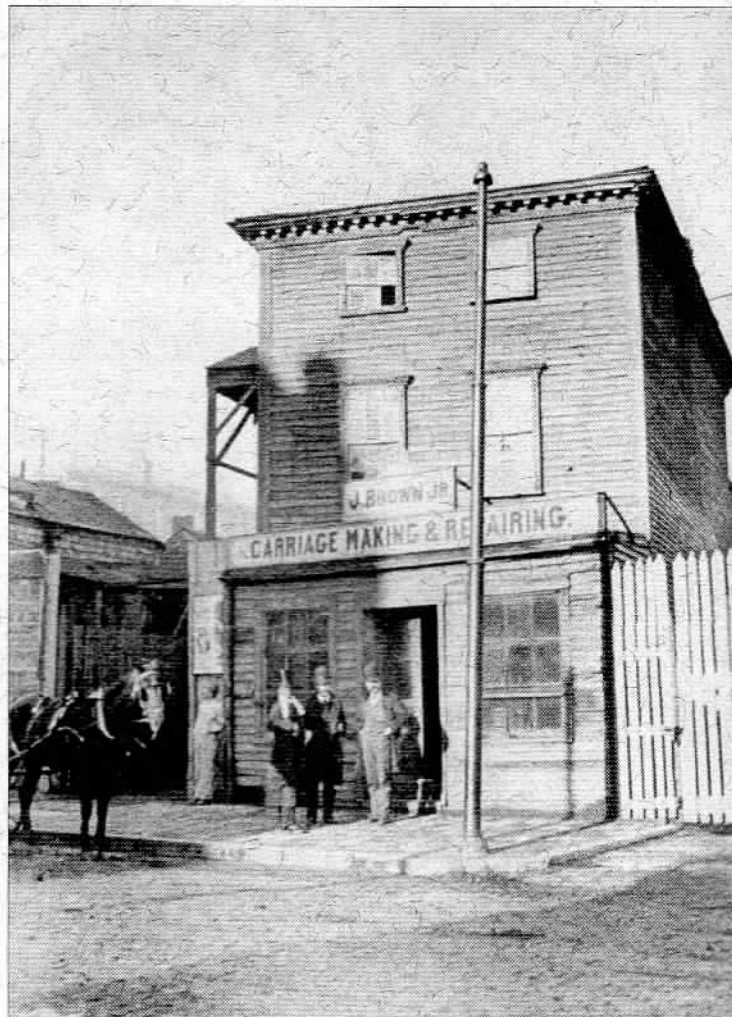
Buoyed by city emergency funding of more than \$1 million to stabilize the two buildings, contractors have been working in the Porter Houses since the fire to shore up walls, put in new floors, and work on new roofs. The construction has not included new stairs and finish work.

Meanwhile a historic documentation team of The South End Historical Society's Curator Kimberly Alexander Shilland and Preservation Director Eben Kunz, working with contractors and the BRA, have measured every inch of the building and removed much of the Federal-style detail, including mantelpieces and trim, to the society's headquarters for safekeeping.

The Allen House, currently undergoing the same intensive stabilization effort, will be completed in August.

LAST CHANCE TO SEE EXHIBIT

The *Down Washington Street* exhibit, now scheduled to be on



The *Down Washington Street* exhibit remains on display through August. This is the residence of Edward Tuckerman (1740-1818) on the corner of Dover and Orange (Later Washington) Streets. Built in 1767, the house was here photographed in April of 1890.

photo: courtesy of Society of Preservation of New England Antiquities

display through August, provides a context for those who ask why these buildings are important not only to the South End but to the city as a whole. The mayor is appointing a task force to study the new transportation system to replace the elevated that was removed in 1987, a move that many feel is the key to the revitalization of Washington Street.

Spurred on by residents and business people along the Washington Street Corridor, the Boston Society of Architects (BSA) is planning a *Harborvisions* charrette for May of 1996. Its planners will be meeting in mid-September of this year. The BSA is eager to hear from people who are interested in the future of this important area. They want to hear from all residents, business people, users, and community groups along Washington Street who would like to be involved in thinking about the future of the street.

Alexandra Lee of the BSA is available to answer questions participants may have; for more information, call her at (617) 951-1433 ext 225. ♦



Arthur F. Howe
photo: Michael Dunn

Arthur Howe Steps Down as President

BY BARBARA ANDERSON

ARTHUR HOWE SAID he had taken over the presidency of the society ten years earlier. He gave a partial account of how the monies raised by events have been spent. An example is the Church of the Immaculate Conception where the Jesuits wanted to deconsecrate the church and sell it for housing. This is one of the most beautiful churches in the western hemisphere, and there was a tremendous uproar when the public learned it was to be destroyed. The society worked with the Landmarks Commission for the preservation of the church's interior, and the total cost to the society for this legal battle was \$96,000.

Another concern was the Allen House. The city committed over \$1 million to this and the Porter Houses to stabilize them so that developers could start work.

With the help of the society the South End was put on the National Register for Historic Places in 1971. And in 1985, Arthur, representing the historic society, helped establish a density and a rooftop amendment to the zoning code.

Arthur said he has enjoyed working with the society over the past ten years whereupon he was given a standing ovation and presented with tickets to the U.S. Tennis Open Championship and roundtrip airfare. He thanked Fran Duffly for her loyal efforts as administrator of the society and presented her with a gift certificate to Hamersley's Bistro as a personal token of his appreciation. He asked Kimberly Shilland to say a few words about the Allen and the Porter Houses. He then introduced Robert Campbell, architecture critic for the *Boston Globe* and the guest speaker for the evening. Mr. Campbell said Boston is the best historically documented city in the country. We have managed to keep the downtown where many influential people still live. We must be aware of the past and hope for the future and not live just in the present. Stephen Greene, our new president, spoke briefly about his plans for the year after which the meeting adjourned for refreshments. ♦

Stephen Greene Plans Future of SEHS

PRESERVATION WILL BE the focus of Stephen Greene's administration as president of The South End Historical Society. At the top of his list is preserving the headquarters of the society, which needs extensive repair. For that work he will be calling on the help of the organization's fundraisers.

Greene also hopes to continue the work of preservation in the neighborhood, including oral histories and traditions which need to be recorded. He suggests engaging the help of children to collect this invaluable information.

The sense of community that has made The SEHS successful in the past will be vital to his administration. Greene feels certain that the interaction of the society's members as they work together will eventually accomplish the vital work that needs to be done.

As corporate environmental manager at Polaroid's headquarters in Cambridge, MA for the past five years, Greene will be using his business experience to accomplish the goals of the society. He has been active in the electronic industry and with environmental groups for 25 years. A graduate of Boston University with a degree in biology and marine science, his master's is from B.U.'s Oceanographic Institute at Wood's Hole, Massachusetts. ♦



Departing President Arthur F. Howe and
President Stephen Greene
photo: Michael Dunn

This newsletter is published by The South End Historical Society, 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, 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

(Continued from Page 1)

the Boston neighborhood. He recalled hearing about the area for the first time at Fort Dix, New Jersey from the son of the administrator of the South End House, a settlement house that had existed for generations. When the two visited Boston on a weekend pass in the 1950s, he saw that his friend was embarrassed by having grown up in the South End, which was then a slum. Although proud of the work that his family had done there, he shared a sense with Campbell that the South End was a treeless, dry, dusty, and unpleasant place.

"I think it's important to maintain these memories because as I was driving over here tonight I thought, my god, there are so many trees. There are thousands of trees. There were no trees that I can remember, and so I looked at them more closely as I drove around looking for a parking space.

"My friend from the army, incidentally, was one of the wildest characters I have ever known; never finished high school, never went to college, always in trouble, got kicked out of the army for various malfeasances, and I lost track of him for about thirty years. Then, by chance, I connected up again with him and discovered that he was living in Spartanburg, South Carolina with a happy family and is an Episcopal bishop. That's the only advantage of growing old. That you witness these extraordinary transformations in the people that you know. Some going up and some going down."

At the beginning of his career as an architect, Campbell recalled that his effort to build two blocks of low-income housing across the street from the New Hope Baptist Church never materialized. Other than attending a house tour, Campbell's next involvement with the South End did not occur until this year when he wrote an article for the *Boston Globe* ("To Heal A City," February 5, 1995) in support of restoring Chester Park, "Once...very possibly, the most beautiful piece of open space in Boston."

The plan to restore the beautiful Anglophile oval that was destroyed as a public space when Massachusetts Avenue plowed through it in the 1950s includes plunging the street into a tunnel under the park.

Worried that the idea would be scrapped before the article appeared in print, he found to his astonishment that the mayor directed the city to give serious consideration to the proposal, thanks to the backbone and tenacity of South End residents who are its advocates.

BLOOMSBURY WITH STOOPS

"It's a neighborhood that I think if I were coming to Boston and had no reason to look one place rather than another would probably choose to live in. I like it. I was trying to think coming over here why I have always liked it so much — in recent years, anyway. It has a wonderful kind of informality. The streets crash into one another at funny angles. There's a great variety of scale. There are short streets and long avenues along Columbus and Tremont, and the people have a similar nature; they crash into each other. There's no homogeneity,

there's no uniformity."

Campbell sees in the streets a metaphor for the diversity and combativeness of the population in the South End. "It doesn't have the preciousness or rigor of the Back Bay, as marvelous as that neighborhood is. It doesn't have the sense of aren't we proud we live here that you find sometimes in Beacon Hill, to an excess. There's pride in the neighborhood, but it's a relaxed, humane kind of pride, and it's also less expensive than some of those other neighborhoods, although not much.

"It's an English model. For some reason, Americans are always falling in love every 25 years with a different European culture, and the pattern for the South End was an Anglophile period. I would describe the area as Bloomsbury with stoops. The neighborhoods like it in London were created a generation earlier, or more, but they were all organized around green squares, ovals, or crescents where people could gather and build a membership. A generation later when Bostonians built the Back Bay, they were in love with France and the boulevards of Paris that were built by Haussmann in the 1860s. The grandeur of those boulevards is replicated in Commonwealth Avenue and the initial architecture there included French Mansards. A generation later Bostonians were in love with German culture but that didn't seem to have a similar impact in Boston.

"The South End is just a very beautiful neighborhood. In the course of the Chester Square debate, I went to a meeting at Ken Kruckemeyer's house on Holyoke Street. Coming out on the stoop of his house I thought, this is one of the most beautiful streets I have ever seen in my life. It was a moonlit starry night, and it had rained. The moonlight reflecting off



Robert Campbell and members of The South End Historical Society

photo: Michael Dunn

the rain on the stoops, the trees rustling, the stars above, and these houses with their lights in the bay windows were just incredibly beautiful; I also thought he was lucky that he got here when houses didn't cost \$800,000."

PRESERVATION'S BIG PICTURE

Fascinated by the subject of preservation, Campbell said he is also puzzled by it. He identified the movement, from its inception in 1965 with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, as a reaction against the rapid change of urban renewal when cities were destroyed by highways.

"You don't want to live in a world in which you can no longer find the place where you had your first job, your first kiss, where you can't find the landmarks of your life any more. When that begins to happen people either become depressed, or they take action. I think that was the first motive for preservation, and it won that battle. It stopped the West-End scale of violent redevelopment and slowed the pace of change."

Preservation then began to focus on what the city should be. "I don't think preservation has anything to do with nostalgia for the past." In older neighborhoods, Campbell would separate good from bad ideas rather than old from new. "As preservationists we should be asking ourselves what values create the best city: What architecture, what urbanism will bring us together as people, encourage us to debate, learn about each other, and continue to support democracy? I'm not sure that exchange is going to be possible if we all withdraw into gated compounds somewhere in the suburbs where we never see each other except on the television. The South End is a perfect example of the kind of neighborhood that brings

people out into the public streets and squares and introduces them to one another."

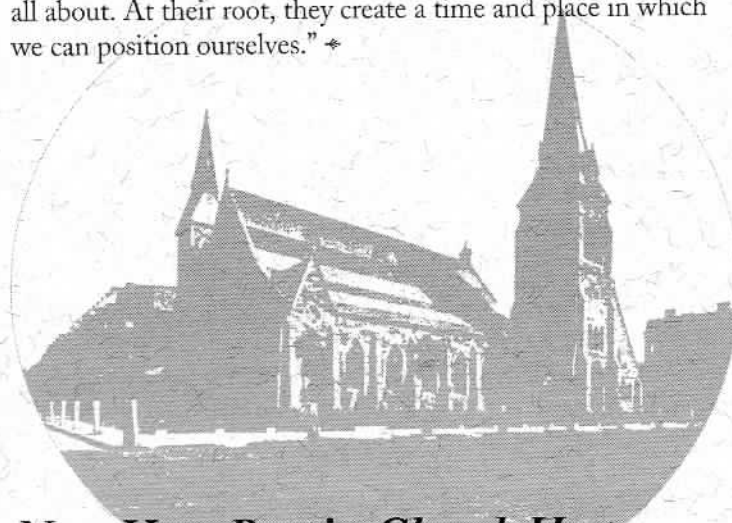
It's more important for the world to be interesting and useful than beautiful, said Campbell. He reminded his audience that Henry James described Boston in the 1900s as boring and monotonous, both socially and physically. Campbell prefers the Boston of today where the jostling of different periods and scales gives an interest and vitality that are worth the exchange even though many contemporary buildings are ugly. He quoted Lewis Mumford's definition of the city as the smallest possible area where you have the greatest possible variety of commercial, ethical, and social choice.

Campbell lauded Mayor Thomas M. Menino's recent nominations of the Paramount, the Modern, and the Savoy theaters to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of the most endangered sites in the United States. "The mayor proves himself to be what he claimed he was, that is, genuinely interested in preservation. I can't even remember a political administrator in Boston nominating endangered buildings and

trying to call the world's attention to their being so."

To pose the question of why people care about history and preservation, Campbell recalled the dilemma of Orlando, Virginia Woolf's character in her novel by the same name. Having lived for centuries, Orlando eventually arrives at Thursday, the eleventh of October, 1928 where a vision that recurs throughout the day concentrates Orlando's past into a single point that is empty and meaningless. "For what more terrifying revelation can there be than...the present moment? That we survive the shock at all is only possible because the past shelters us on one side, the future on another," writes Woolf.

A visible timeline, Campbell concluded, supports our sense that we are somewhere. Just as with time, so it is with place. "If I am standing here with nothing around me, I am nowhere. Only within a physical context — a North, South, East, and West where a couple of paths cross — can I say I'm here, I'm in a place. That is what neighborhoods like the South End are all about. At their root, they create a time and place in which we can position ourselves." ♦



New Hope Baptist Church Hosts Society's Annual Meeting

THE NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH, 740 Tremont Street, welcomed The South End Historical Society for their annual meeting. Dedicated on New Year's Day, 1862, the Tremont Street Methodist-Episcopal Church remained on this site until the 1970s.

Hammatt Billings designed the first Roxbury puddingstone building in the Gothic-Revival style, with spires of 100 and 150 feet each with lancet windows and buttresses. The church contains two entrances and two nave forms that are melded together. The original E.E. Howard clock remains, as does the original organ built by E. & G.G. Hook. Except for the loss of its polychrome slate roof, the church building looks much as it did a century ago. The church was a leader in the Methodist world missionary movement. Some of the stained glass windows honor the missionaries who went out to India and China from this church.

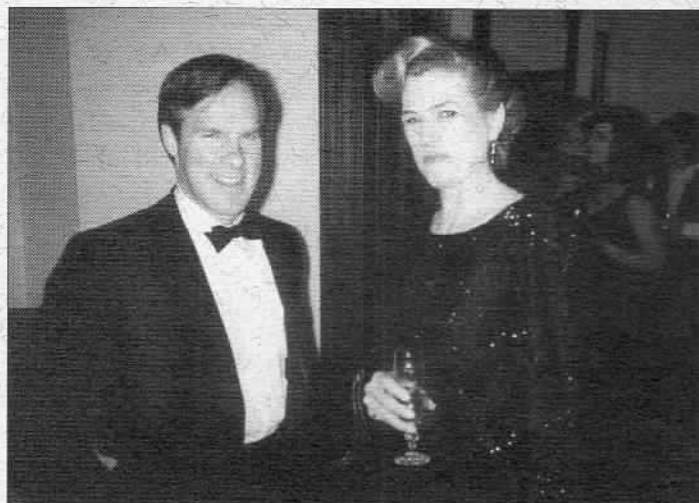
Reprinted by permission of The Boston Preservation Alliance from their publication, Religious Property Tours of Back Bay, Central Boston, West End, Beacon Hill, and the South End. ♦



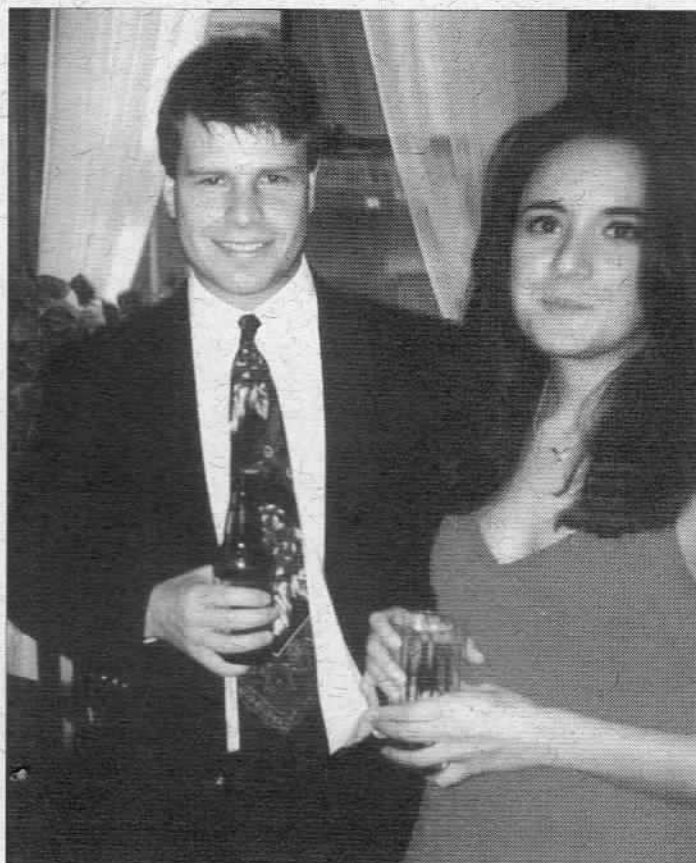
Festivities Before the Spring Ball

MEMBERS OF THE South End Historical Society gathered at the house of Margaret Preston and Fernando Requena before attending the Spring Ball at the Boston Ballet Center. (Our thanks to the following supporters of the Spring Ball whose names were not listed on the invitation: Rose and Charles Mehegan; Prudential Property Company, Inc.; and Jim McQueen.)

Photographs: Stephen Greene.



Eric Dray and Margaret Preston



Stephen Guay, M.D., and Catharine Greene



Karen Parker and Paula Ferme



Nathan Tanzie
Bob and Joanne Tanzie

NEWS • AND • EVENTS



Pam Howland, Anna Greene,
and Paul Greene



Patrick Requena, Christian Requena,
Jamie Requena, and Margaret Preston



Steve and
Amy Myers



*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 _____

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individual..... \$15.00 _____

family/dual..... \$25.00 _____

patron..... \$75.00 _____

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

additional

contribution..... \$25.00 _____

..... \$50.00 _____

..... \$100.00 _____

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Please make checks payable to The South End Historical Society. All contributions are tax deductible.



Union United Methodist Church's Steeple Receives Grant from SEHS

IN ORDER TO SAVE the steeple of the Union United Methodist Church on Columbus Avenue in the South End, The South End Historical Society has voted to contribute \$3000 to help stabilize it. The society is requesting that parishioners of the church raise a matching fund of \$9000 within a year in order to obtain the grant.

Jeanne Galicich, heading the Steeples Project for Historic Boston Incorporated, submitted a summary of the project to the society in an appeal for their financial aid. The rare Roxbury puddingstone and sandstone-trimmed steeple of the church is a beacon in the South End and the crowning glory of the 1872 English-style country church. However, as is often the case, the distinguishing feature of the building is also the most endangered.

In a comprehensive building assessment commissioned by the church, architects McGinley Hart & Associates reported that, "The spire section of the steeple is in especially poor condition. Since water runs down the face of this surface, the masonry is asked to perform more like a roof than a wall. The large quantity of water which has entered the spire masonry has allowed freeze-thaw action to accelerate the rate of deterioration. The deterioration was so extensive that we recommend closing or protecting the main entrance at the base of the steeple," said Wendall Kalsow, the lead architect on the project. The report notes that the poor condition of the mortar is allowing water to pour into the steeple and the main building, causing substantial damage. The McGinley Hart report estimates that repairs to the steeple will cost \$300,000, and another \$600,000 will be required for other work on the rest of the church over five years.✧

✧New Members✧

Stephen Abarbanel &	Joan Lehman
Ruth Robertson	Rod Levesque
John Andrews	Celeste &
John Archibald	W.L. Maness
Ronald L. Cheney	William Markos
Judith Collins	David McCarthy &
Joseph M. DePippo	Alan Rapoport
Robert E. Doherty	Robert B. Minturn, Jr.
Richard M. Fletcher	Kellie Moran
Gloria Ganno	Bruce Phelps &
Diane Gipson	Buddy Lancaster
Elizabeth Gipson	Mr. & Mrs. William
Carolyn & Roland Glenn	Rotch, Jr.
John Goll,	St. John the Baptist Church
Goll Insurance Agency	Heather Smith
Gavin Hilgemeier	June Smith &
Mr. & Mrs. Mark	Steve Pensinger
Holthouse	Joseph Studer &
Reverend Dr. Kirk B. Jones,	Mark Juairé
Ebenezer Baptist Church	Ian Watson
Kiki Kneeland	Scott D. Wolf

1995 annual membership fees are due now.



The South End Historical Society

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