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Photo and Image Collections at SEHS

By Jason Amos

As part of the South End Historical Society’s mission to preserve the history of the neighborhood, we collect and make available material that documents that history. The most frequent request that we receive is for photographs. Whether it is for displaying in your home, research, or a South End Landmark District application, there are a few photo and image collections that we consult when someone requests a photo.

Aertsen-Blair Collection

The Aertsen-Blair collection is not like any of the other photo and image collections that SEHS has. While the other collections emphasize the architecture of the neighborhood, this collection is people oriented. It consists of more than 100 photographs that were found at 175 West Brookline Street and date from the 1890s through the 1940s.

When the collection first came to the Historical Society, the original owner of the photos was unknown. With the assistance of two volunteers, every photo was studied for clues about who was in the
Dear Friends,

It is with immense pleasure that I am able to write this from our headquarters at 532 Massachusetts Ave. For the last 18 months we have been closed like much of the country because of the pandemic, but we are now in the office on a regular basis. Because of the size of our space we are still not open for research or any in-person programs, but we are looking forward to having programs when we can.

Although things are starting to open up and restrictions are lifting, we have decided to present our 2021 House Tour virtually. There is a lot of planning that goes into the tour each year, and while we would like nothing more than to gather in person and celebrate our neighborhood’s history, the only way to make sure our fundraiser happens is by presenting it virtually. Stay tuned for more details.

Jason Amos  
Executive Director

Recently installed sign in Chester Square.
At our annual meeting on June 24th we provided a summary of our activities over the past year. A brief summary is presented below.

Like many non-profits, the COVID-19 pandemic caused us to change the way we operated for the last 18 months. First, our offices were closed to the public. This meant that we were not able to host any of our in-person events. Secondly, it meant that we could not hold our annual House Tour in person; however, we were able to transition it to a virtual format. While many of the COVID-19 restrictions that had been in place for more than a year have been lifted, to make sure our 2021 House Tour is able to proceed we have made the decision to have a virtual event again this winter.

While researchers were not able to visit us, we were able to expand the scope of our collections by accepting three donations of material. The first was the records of the Friends of Hayes Park, which documents the design, development, and construction of the park. The second was a collection of 35mm negatives from the 1970s that focus on the people who lived in the neighborhood. The donor took the photos as part of a project to help kids in the suburbs understand what life was like in the city. The last donation we received was a collection of photographic slides from the 1990s. We have also been working on the long-term digital preservation of our scans of the 1972 South End Streets Survey, so we can maintain access to the digital version of the images in the future.

Additionally, we have been busy around our building. Last year, the City of Boston’s Community Preservation program awarded the Historical Society $100,000 for the repair of our historic curved sashes and the replacement of the old replacement windows. Despite receiving this grant, we would not have been able to do this work without our members’ support over the years, so thank you.
images and where they were taken. The volunteers found that many of the professional images were taken in Boston, but some were taken as far away as New Brunswick, Canada. It was eventually concluded that the photos belonged to the Gallivan family, who owned 175 West Brookline Street from 1953 to 1975.

**Richard O. Card Collection**

One of the largest collections that the Historical Society has is the Richard O. Card Collection. Card was a founding member of the Historical Society and served as its President for many years. Over his life, he collected copies of several hundred images, mostly from the Victorian period, of the South End and Boston. In addition to collecting these images from various repositories around Boston and as far away as the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, Card also included notes on the history or significance of each of their subjects.

While the collection is extensive, most of them are of churches, parks, and other easily identified landmarks in the South End. If a photo of a home is requested, it is unlikely to be found in this collection. The exception to this is if it the building is near one of the landmarks and appears at the edges of the photo.

**Roche Postcard Collection**

The Roche Postcard collection is similar to the Card Collection in that the images focus on the landmarks in the neighborhood. This collection fills in a gap in the photos and images that we have, as many of the postcards are from the early 20th century – a period that is not well documented in our other photo and image collections. While some of the postcards have writing on their backs, the information is usually only a brief note about the sender’s travels.
1972 South End Streets Survey

The largest photo collection that we have - and the one that we are most known for - is our 1972 South End Streets Survey. In 1972, the Historical Society undertook the project of having the South End added to the National Register of Historic Places. As part of the application process we photographed much of the surviving original Victorian architecture. If you are asked for a photo as part of an SELDC application or are interested in a historic photo of your home, it will most likely be found in this collection; however, there are some street that we do not have photos of.

In addition to photographing each building, the photographers also filled out survey forms that described them. They recorded such things as the number of stories, number of steps to the main entrance, and how far each building is set back from the street. All of this work resulted in the South End being placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

Cast Iron Survey Collection

The Cast Iron Survey Collection is the result of two consultants who were hired to create a detailed summary of the existing cast iron in the neighborhood in 1996. With a camera, survey sheets, and a magnet on a pole the consultants examined more than 1,700 properties and took more than 600 photos of the neighborhood’s cast iron handrails and garden fencing.

On the survey forms, the consultants recorded information about the design, materials, and condition as well as drawings of the cast iron or other railings and fencings found on each property. The survey sheets are important because if an entire street had the same pattern, the consultants would often only take one photo and note all of the addresses on that block that had the same pattern.
With Boston’s former mayor Martin Walsh’s confirmation as U.S. Labor Secretary, he became the third person born in Boston to hold this position. The first person was Frances Perkins, who in addition to having the distinction of being the first woman to serve in a Presidential cabinet was born in the South End on 10 April 1880 at 12 Worcester Square. At the age of two, her family moved to Worcester, Massachusetts where her father ran his own stationery store.

After graduating from Mount Holyoke College and then Columbia College, Frances eventually took a job with the New York City Consumers League, focusing on labor and social issues. She became the executive secretary of the Committee on Safety following the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire on March 25, 1911 in New York City.

Her work on issues relating to labor brought her into contact with many politicians in New York, including Governor Al Smith, who appointed her to the New York Industrial Commission. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected New York’s governor in 1928, he appointed Perkins the Industrial Commissioner for New York, making her responsible for the state’s Labor Department. As Commissioner she reduced women’s work weeks to 48 hours and worked to improve working conditions in factories.

In 1932, when Roosevelt was elected President, he asked Perkins to serve as his Secretary of Labor. Her acceptance of the offer was dependent upon Roosevelt supporting her goals for bettering labor in America – 40-hour work weeks, banning child labor, a national minimum wage, and Social Security, among other things.

Although not as well known today, Perkins was one of only two members of Roosevelt’s cabinet to serve through all 12 years of his presidency, and many of the issues that Perkins championed eventually became law as part of Roosevelt’s New Deal.
Self-Guided Audio Walking Tour

Now when you visit the South End, you can learn more about its history with an audio tour created by the South End Historical Society and UniGuide. Starting at SEHS in Chester Square, the walking tour takes you through 12 points of interest in this historic neighborhood (such as the Porter House, Blackstone & Franklin Square, and Union Park).

UniGuide is a free smartphone app that provides you with hundreds of audio tours across the United States. Access all tours in a single app, stream them or download ahead of time to save data.

Get the app for your phone and listen to a wonderfully curated tour of the South End.

Visit http://uniguide.me/ to download the app.

House Histories

In our previous newsletter, we highlighted sources that can be used for conducting research on the history of your home. If you have done any research, we encourage you to consider donating a copy of it to the South End Historical Society. By donating your research to the Historical Society you will be helping to preserve the neighborhood’s history and make it available for future generations. If you would like to donate your research, please email us at: admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org

Pictures from SEHS Collection Available for Reproduction

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

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

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