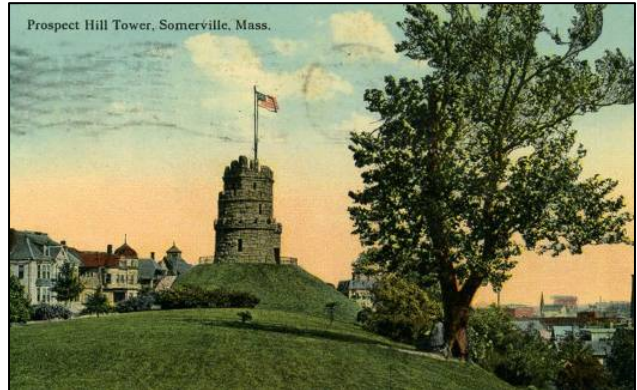


Somerville's Union Square: Historic Crossroads of Commerce

Walking Tour led by Edward W. Gordon, Architectural Historian and sponsored by the Arts Union Project Fall 2010

During the 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries Middlesex County farmers passed through Union Square on their way to the markets at City Square in Charlestown, and Faneuil Hall in Boston. These "market men" hauled wagons full of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products along this historic transportation corridor which included Elm Street, Somerville Avenue and Washington Street. On April 19, 1775 Milk Row was the road taken by the retreating British Red Coats as they staggered back to Boston from the historic skirmishes in Concord and Menotomy



(Arlington). The Prospect Hill tower, looming over the eastern section of Union Square, marks the site of General Israel Putnam's encampment of patriotic troops. It is also the place where the Grand Union Flag - the first flag representing the thirteen colonies of America--was first flown on January 1, 1776. One decade later, the Warren Bridge linking Charlestown with Boston opened with much fanfare, greatly expediting the flow of commercial traffic along Milk Row through what is now Union Square.



Commercial and residential development in and around Union Square grew with the expansion of railroad service. In 1835, the Boston and Lowell Railroad opened the first railroad station in Somerville on the south side of Washington Street near Joy Street. The Kent Street station on the Fitchburg Railroad followed in 1842. Then in 1845 horse car service was established between Union Square and Harvard Square in Cambridge along Kirkland and Washington Streets.

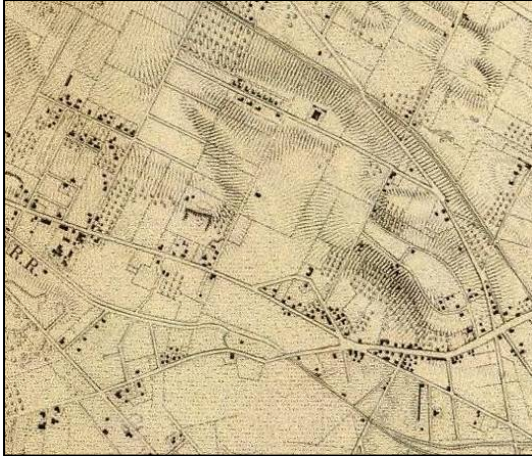
Additions to the streetcar line provided residents of the Union Square area with easy commuting service to Boston. The transportation lines were a major factor in triggering growth for Somerville becoming a town separate from Charlestown in 1842.

Railroads encouraged new industries to locate along the tracks, including the American Tube Works Company in 1851 on Somerville Avenue west of Union Square, and the Union Glass Company in 1854 to the south at Prospect and Webster Streets. Later nearby businesses included wood-working shops, ice businesses, and carriage factories.



In many ways, Union Square was an unlikely place to become a hub of commerce. The nature of the terrain on its south side was characterized by creeks and wetlands associated with the Miller's River. While the river once provided a clear boundary between Somerville and Cambridge, it is now completely obscured by landmaking projects of the 1830s-to-1880s. The sandy soils deposited by Miller's River gave the area its first name, "Sandpit Square". The silica-rich soil was also valuable for businesses making glass in nearby factories. One of the more high profile improvements realized from early land reclamation in the area (ca.1830) was the continuation of Somerville Avenue as a "straight shot" over former marshland from Carlton Street/Bow Street eastward into the center of Union Square. This construction project meant the discontinuation of Bow Street as a segment of Milk Row as its "bowed-out" to avoid the wetlands on its south side.

The name of this Square was adopted during the early 1860s when the area was host to a Union Army Recruitment Station. Troops bound for battles in the southern states were stationed atop Prospect Hill. After the Civil War, Union Square became recognizable as a major commercial center complete with business



buildings and peripheral industrial complexes. Buildings that survive from the period of post war growth (1865-1880) symbolize Somerville's transition from a town to an incorporated city in 1872. By the early 1870s, a center was formed by the intersection of Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, Bow Street, Webster Avenue and Prospect Street. These crossroads became bordered by stylish and substantial wood and brick commercial blocks.

Who were the customers of early Union Square commercial businesses? Some were affluent Yankee Protestants whose enclaves atop Prospect and Spring Hills had begun to evolve during the period of 1840-1860. Other patrons were drawn from the modest homes of employees of the Middlesex Bleachery

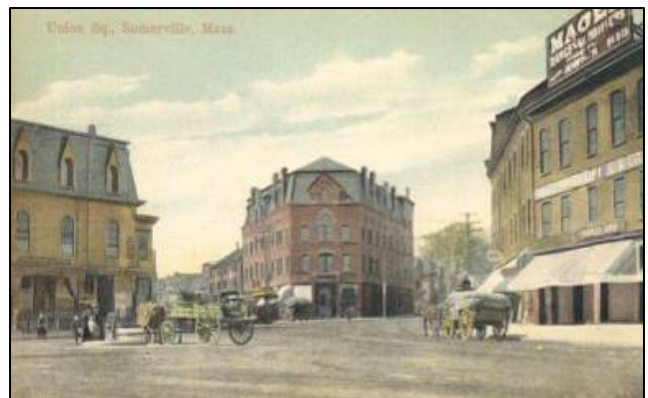
and American Tube Works, who lived further to the west along or near Somerville Avenue. Many of these workers who spent their hard-earned wages in Union Square shops were natives of Ireland. The Irish, with subsequent waves of newcomers, shaped the physical appearance of the Square--as seen in its surviving churches and commercial buildings. More recently immigrants from Asia, Haiti, Brazil and other Latin American countries have started new lives in the area.



Around 1890, the electric trolley linked Union Square with surrounding communities-- primarily accounting for the largest growth spurt in Somerville's history. The population surged from 40,152 in 1890 to 77,236 in 1910. The new trolley service accelerated the demand for goods and services as well as housing. One high profile symbol of this growth can be seen in the large wood commercial/residential Drouet Block at Bow Street and Somerville Avenue.

The growth of automobile ownership during the 1910s and 1920s significantly influenced the area's development. A plethora of fuel stations, garages and repair shops document this then revolutionary mode of transportation.

After 1920, building construction in Somerville slowed dramatically, due to a general economic decline that preceded and then deepened during the Depression years. While fires took their toll with the earlier wood buildings, some had their upper stories removed because of an inability to attract office rentals. Others were intentionally demolished to accommodate more cost-effective buildings (e.g. destruction of the 1869 Masonic Building for the Hurley Building at 20-29 Union Square). Despite substantial conflagrations, alterations and demolitions, many structures still document the square's evolution from 1845 to the present. Historic photographs are excellent resources to guide the recreation of upper floors and roof tops. Appropriate new zoning, historic districts, and the Green-line extension herald a bright, new future for the Square with its diverse multi-ethnic community and businesses.



The tour begins on the plaza in the heart of Union Square.

Somerville Police Headquarters (1932), 66-70 Union Square



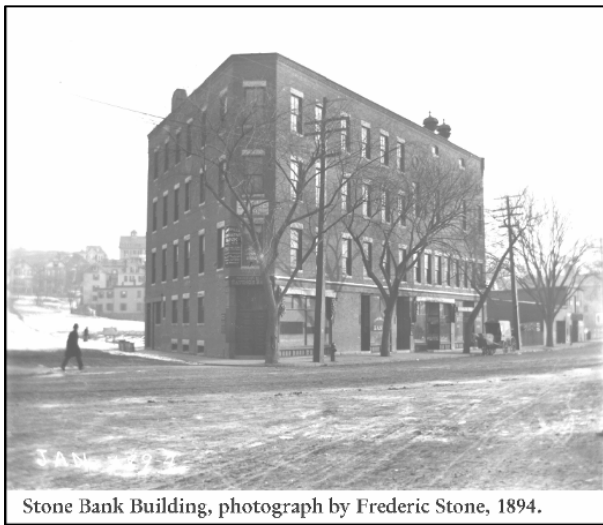
The street façade of this red brick and cast stone-trimmed building strikes an elegant Classical Revival note on the north side of Union Square. Characterized by the symmetrical placement of windows and a central entrance, the classical features of the building include Italian Renaissance Revival rustication on the first story and the console keystone arch above the main entrance. Federal Revival characteristics can also be seen on the upper stories in the flat Ionic pilasters, wedge-shaped window lintels, and panel-accented parapet that encircles the flat roof. This former Somerville Police Headquarters was built in 1932 from designs provided by an unidentified architect, to provide more modern office space than was available at their Mansard style headquarters (1874) on Bow Street. A

new headquarters was needed to keep up with the safety needs of a growing municipality. According to the Somerville Journal in 1900, 46 members served on the force and by 1920, it had more than doubled to 93. The present building opened its doors in 1933, as the only facility of its type in Somerville, and housed more than 150 officers and a constabulary. Since its closing in the 1980's, it has been occupied by commercial offices on the first floor and several restaurants in the basement, including the original Elephant Walk Restaurant, serving French and Cambodian foods, and more recently the Precinct Restaurant and Bar.



Before heading eastward please note on the west side, the Stone Building/Barristers Hall, which has been significantly altered over time, but still retains considerable historic interest.

Stone Building/Barristers Hall (1888), 61 Union Square



Stone Bank Building, photograph by Frederic Stone, 1894.

Despite drastic alterations in the 1960's to its windows and façade, this building retains historic interest due to the ca.1925 limestone concrete commercial window surrounds that strike an Art Deco note. Historic photographs also show prior upper stones trimmed with brick and stone, indicating a Queen Anne sensibility. The eastern wall is particularly noteworthy with the large multi-colored mural by then-local artist Be Sargent Allen. The mural commemorates the Raising of the Grand Union Flag on Prospect Hill on January 1, 1776.

Former Union Square Fire Station (1903),

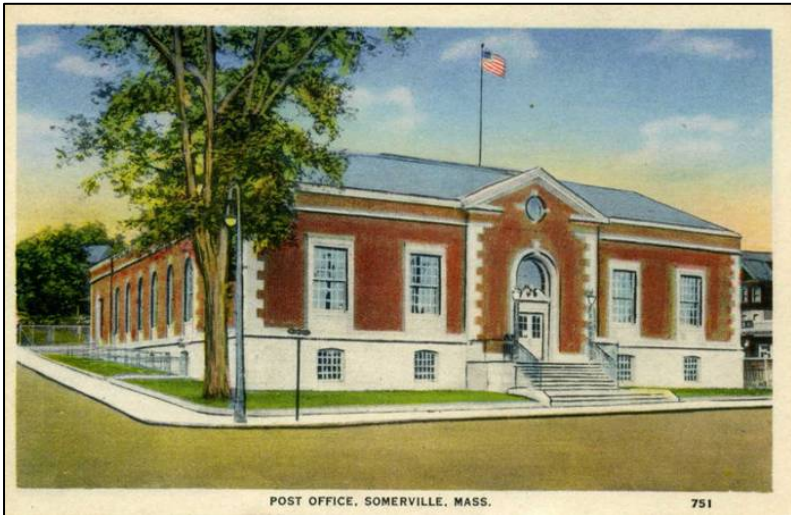
92 Union Square As early as 1838, a fire station occupied this triangular parcel on the east side of the Union Square crossroads. At this time Somerville was still part of Charlestown and civic buildings were constructed of wood, not brick. The original wood



"engine House" or "Mystic No.6" burned in 1855 and a brick building was erected at the same location. In 1866, the second fire station was assigned the title "Hand Engine 1 Station" because it housed Somerville's only hand-powered truck at the time.

In 1903, the City's Commissioner of Buildings, Walter T. Littlefield, designed the current fire station at this site. Like the former Police Headquarters the Union Square Fire Station or Hose Company No.3 may be loosely categorized as Classical Revival with some Georgian Revival style characteristics, as seen in the splayed key stone lintels and modillion block ornamentation beneath the eaves at the roofline. Although the cupola atop its tower was removed at some point during the 1950s, it still stands as a major landmark within the Square, complete with circular, granite-trimmed clock faces. The current tenants are the Somerville Community Access Television (SCATV) which moved into the building in 1982 and the Somerville Portuguese League, who located their offices on the second floor in 1988.

The Union Square Post Office (1935-1936), 237 Washington Street Completing the triumvirate of civic



buildings bordering the northeast corner of Union Square is the United States Post Office. Built in 1935-1936 the building houses Somerville's Main Post Office and has a handsome example of a Colonial Revival or Georgian Revival style edifice. This style was thought to embody the ideals of democracy and created a sense of permanence amidst social change and economic uncertainty. The design of post offices, as well as other Federal public works projects, was the responsibility of the Supervisory Architect of the Treasury. The building was designed by two Bostonians and MIT graduates: Louis Adolf Simon (c.1870-1941) and Maurice

P. Meade (1892-1955). From 1933 until his death in 1941, Simon remained the PWA's Supervising Architect, responsible for numerous post offices, customs houses and court houses. Simon's best-known building was the U.S. Federal Building at the New York World's Fair in 1939-1940. Mead on the other hand was also the architect of post offices in both Arlington and Brookline.

Interestingly, this building was not constructed under the auspices of the well-known Works Progress Administration (WPA), but rather by the Public Works Administration (PWA) created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's National Industry Recovery Act (NIRA) on June 16, 1933. The intent was for large public works projects to increase employment opportunities, stabilize purchasing power, and help revitalize American industry. While many of the PWA projects were monumental--like construction of the Coulee Dam --many more were less grand in style and function--such as the Somerville Main Post Office.



An impressive mural graces one interior wall of the edifice's lobby. It was painted by Ross Embrose Moffett (1887-1971) who was born in Clearfield, Iowa, and began studying art in 1907 at Cummins School of Art in Des Moines. He was long associated with the Provincetown artist colony of the first half of the twentieth century--first as a student of Charles Hawthorne's (1913) and later as the founder of the Province town Painting class (1924).

Shedd House (mid-18th century) a.k.a. the George P. Walker House (ca.1860) 215 Washington Street

Built sometime in the mid-18th century for the Shedd family, this Italianate house has undergone major alterations over time. Major modifications were completed ca. 1860 for George P. Walker, an employee of Union Square's Warren Hotel (razed). Arguably, this house is the most architecturally distinguished residential property in the Square. The Walker House provides evidence that the gambrel roof enjoyed a brief revival of popularity during the late 1850s and 1860s--nearly eighty years after it went out of fashion around 1780 and about 20-30 years before architects employed it on Colonial Revival buildings. The double pitched configuration of its roof was highly practical as snow slid right off and did not accumulate.



MBTA Car Barn (1927), Washington and Merriam Streets

This modern looking structure is part of the former MBTA car barn built in 1927 and incorporates a portion of Somerville's Police and Fire Departments. The original use is best evident within the bricked-in openings of the Merriam Street and Somerville Avenue sides of the car barn.

Hannah J. Allen Building (1890) 210 Washington Street



Hannah J. Allen was born in Massachusetts in 1822. She married Channey Booth in 1848 and by 1850 they resided at McLean Asylum for the Insane that was once located in the Cobble Hill section of East Somerville. Mr. Booth was a physician at the Asylum until his death in 1860. Ten years later, Hannah married Benjamin Allen, a merchant from New Hampshire who invested in Somerville real estate. The Allens were wealthy enough to have an Irish servant girl board with them.

210 Washington Street was one of Mr. Allen's properties, a Queen Anne commercial/residential building designed to house two stores and six residential units, apparently to take advantage of the introduction of the electric trolley to Somerville in 1890. This new form of transportation resulted in a great wave of building construction as nearly half of Somerville's housing stock was built between 1890 and 1910. The Allen Building's earliest known commercial tenants were Henry Freitag who operated a bakery here while the other store contained Decio Biondi's grocery store by 1924. Some Somerville residents may still remember the Rossmore Cafe which occupied both storefronts during the 1940s.

Samuel Holt House (ca.1860), 197 Washington Street

Like the Walker House, the Samuel Holt House was built on the eve of the Civil War. Both houses possess deep set backs from the street and are situated at the base of Prospect Hill. These houses represent two very different aspects of Italianate design with the gambrel-roofed Walker House standing in stark contrast to the gable-roofed Holt House with a cupola at the top.

Samuel Holt, an early, if not original owner, is variously described in business directories as a "teamster" and a "truckman," meaning that he hauled materials and products for a living. He commuted to work at Fifield,



Richardson & Company on Chauncy Street in Boston where he was on the board until he retired in 1895. Holt was also a member of the Boston Volunteer Fire Department for 9 years and a charter member of the Boston Light Artillery. In 1884 and 1885 he served on the Common Council, a predecessor to the Board of Aldermen in 1884 and 1885, as well as on the Somerville Board of Aldermen from 1886-1887. By the 1880s, Holt's sons Charles L., a traveling salesman, and Arthur, a "treasurer," are listed as residents here, while Samuel's widow, Mary E. Holt lived here into the early 1900s. The Holt House has been occupied as a funeral home since at least the early 1930s.

The site also hosts a granite marker for James Miller, who was killed during a skirmish with the British during their Retreat from Lexington on April 19th, 1775. He is reputed to have said to his sons that "I am too old to run but not to fight" as the British made their way around Prospect Hill to Charlestown.

After viewing the Holt House/Cota-Struzzieri Funeral Home, follow Washington Street a short distance and turn right onto Rossmore Street. Lined with three-decker houses, this street, together with Mansfield Street to the east, was set out between 1884 and 1895 over land that had been part of the vast land holdings of grain dealer Nathan Tufts. Following Rossmore Street southward and turn left at Somerville Avenue.

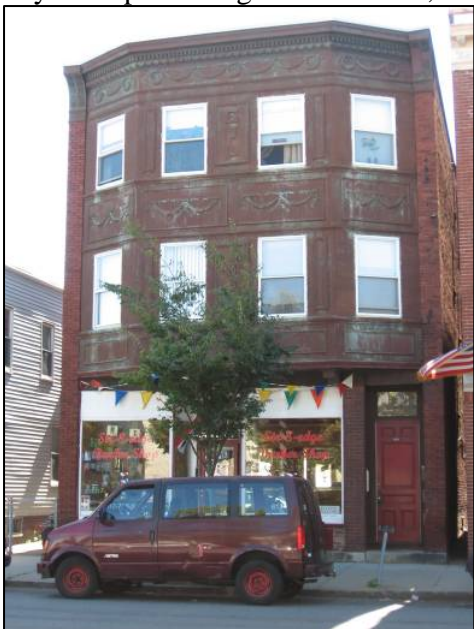
Northern Artery Filling Station (1927), 181 Somerville Avenue

Built in 1927, the Northern Artery Filling Station at 181 Somerville Avenue marks the beginning of a proliferation of independent gas stations, separate from private parking garage facilities throughout the country and signifies how entrenched automobile use had become. The early 20th century introduced automobile traffic to Union Square, and vehicular circulation has significantly influenced the development of the area ever since. The construction of Route 28 at the east end of the district linked the area to Cambridge and Medford.



Back tracking westward along Somerville Avenue, pause to consider the turn-of-the-twentieth century streetscape at 216 and 218-218B Somerville Avenue.

This historic streetscape documents Union Square's turn-of-the-twentieth century prosperity and is worthy of preservation for future generations. Not unlike late nineteenth century mixed-use buildings in Boston's North End, **216 Somerville Avenue**, features a main facade dominated by a broad, full-length, three-story oriel bay. Composed of galvanized iron, this massive projection features the initials E.J.L. 1896 on one of its



ornamental panels. The L may stand for Lewellyn as a M. Lewellyn owned the building in 1900. By 1897, John Sweeney's Grocery Store was located on the ground floor, and a Mr. Sweeney, and William Hood, a watchman in East Cambridge, were tenants in the building's two residential units.

Next door at **218-218B Somerville Avenue (1926)** is a handsome,

two-story commercial block designed in the Colonial Revival style, boasting boldly rendered ribbon and sway ornamentation. The ground floor storefronts were occupied by Rafaele D. Vasta's fish store and Salvatore Ciano's grocery.



From the corner of Somerville Avenue and Merriam Street walk westward along the south side of Somerville Avenue to Prospect Street.

Barnes and Walsh Company Building (ca.1933) 224 Somerville Avenue Constructed during the early 1930s, this concrete and brick commercial structure has substantial aesthetic appeal despite being a utilitarian building. The concrete walls suggest formal rustication, while the stepped parapet has a Deco sensibility. The Barnes & Walsh Auto Body Repair Shop has been located in this building since at least 1940.

Thomas and Katherine O'Keefe House (ca.1890) 261 Somerville Avenue This modest Italianate house was built around 1890 for a blacksmith whose shop was once located next door. The O'Keefe House provides evidence that the Italianate style that came to the fore around 1850 was still used in the design of Somerville houses as late as 1890. The intact and ornate bracketed door hood and paired brackets at the eaves illustrates why the Italianate style is sometimes called the "bracketed style".

Union Square Garage (1914), 267-271 Somerville Avenue The Union Square Garage is the earliest known and surviving auto-related building in the Union Square area. Measuring approximately 113 feet wide by 50 feet deep, this building occupies the entire lot. Two of the three center bays are still extant with ca.1960 overhead doors. The rhythmic repetition of segmental-arched bays at the second story strike an old fashioned, late nineteenth century note, while the 16 segmental arched windows underscore the horizontal massing of the building. The Union Square Garage first appears in the City Directory in 1915 at 269 Somerville Avenue, along with 18 other automobile garages in Somerville.

At the intersection of Prospect Street and Somerville Avenue consider the Union Glass Company located to the south at the Prospect/Webster crossroads.

Organized in 1854, Union Glass specialized in the manufacture of flint glass products, including tableware, lamps, globes, and shades. For its first two decades it was the town's largest industrial employer. At the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 the company's exhibit featured a 150 pound punch bowl that was reportedly the largest piece of glass ever made. The Union Glass Company remained in business until as late as 1924.



Continuing westward from Prospect Street along Somerville Avenue, walk across the Square to the northwest corner of Washington Street and Somerville Avenue. From this vantage point consider St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church and the Union Building.

Robert A. Vinal Jr. House (ca.1845), 15 Union Square

Currently housing the Mid-Nite Convenience Store, the small cottage-scale Greek Revival structure at 15 Union Square is the oldest building in the Union Square area. Robert Aldersey Vinal (1821-1887) worked in his father's grain Mill in North Chelsea, now Revere, and his store in Boston. Over time, Robert and his brother Quincy Adams Vinal amassed an extensive real estate portfolio that included much of Prospect Hill, as well as numerous lots bordering Union Square. Vinal likely built the house at Union Square as a rental property, although he may have lived there for a few years. In 1859, Queen Victoria's son, the future King Edward VII, passed through Union Square in a private carriage on his way from Harvard College to Boston. Fast forwarding to the early nineteenth century this building contained DiPrato Brothers Confectioners and then from 1914-1933, ice cream was sold here. Other tenets include a clothing store and shoe shine business.



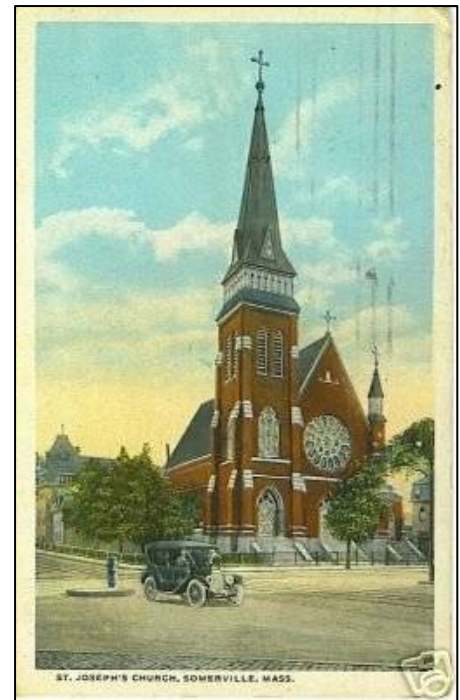


Union Building (1922), 16 Union Square The classical detailing in this building can be seen in the pedimented entrance surround and pilaster-like panels between the second story windows. Constructed by an unidentified architect in 1922, the commercial tenants on the ground floor, through 1940, included a men's clothing store, a confectioner, an insurance company, and a lunch counter. The second story tenants included a lawyer, dentist, hairdresser and barber. Minor repairs were made to the building after a fire in 1942. During the 1950s, Goodwin's

Furniture and Bernie's Record Shop were located in this building.

St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church (1870-1874), 13 Webster Avenue, corner of Washington Street

Built from Victorian Gothic designs provided by James Murphy who is credited with St. Gregory's Roman Catholic Church (1864) in the Lower Mills section of Dorchester, St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church is a major landmark in the heart of Union Square, despite the removal of its steeple in 1978. Before its completion during the early 1870s, Somerville's 2,000 Catholics had to walk to Roman Catholic churches in Cambridge and Charlestown to worship. This Victorian Gothic church was a watershed in the history of Somerville; it symbolized more peaceful relations between local Catholics and Protestants, and marked the rising influence of the Irish within the City. Until the influx of new arrivals was slowed to a trickle by the U.S. government in the early 1920s, hundreds of immigrants from Italy, Portugal, Greece and elsewhere settled in three deckers near the Square.



After viewing the church and commercial building round the corner that once contained the late 1860s Masonic Block, and consider the Hill Building on the north side of Somerville Avenue.

Hill Building (1874), 38 Union Square

Built in the High Victorian Gothic style in 1874 and altered by the removal of its upper two floors in 1935, the Hill Building exhibits ca. 1980 storefronts, but occupy the original 19th century bays. This business block was named for its first owner, Ira Hill, who was a major real estate magnate in eastern Somerville during the mid-nineteenth century and was responsible for platting Summit Avenue atop Prospect Hill. It is estimated that this New Hampshire native was responsible for the construction of over 300 buildings in Somerville. In 1875, tenants of the Hill Building included a grocer, a homeopathic physician, the publisher of the Somerville Journal, a real estate agent, and a surveyor. In addition, anti-alcohol or Temperance organizations rented space in this building.

Continue along the north side of Somerville Avenue to the Drouet Block at Bow Street.



Eberle Building (1884), 31-34 Union Square The Eberle Building is a very ornate and well-preserved three-story, brick commercial building. Designed in the Queen Anne style, the storefronts are particularly noteworthy for their intact surrounds. It was named after Phillip Eberle, a shoe dealer, who lived next door at 34 Somerville Avenue in a house he built himself in the 1870s. Eberle's house is delightfully quirky because its unusually narrow facade is surmounted by a very tall and steeply pitched Mansard roof. Eberle helped develop the Masonic Block (1869) which once stood next door to the west.

Saint Thomas Episcopal Church (1870), 300 Somerville Avenue 1870 was a busy year for Church construction in Union Square. Not only had construction begun on St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church's, but also St. Thomas Episcopal Church from designs provided by George Trefren & Son. Partially obscured from view by a modern one-story addition, this Gothic Church previously had a steeple (added in 1897) that rose from its northeast corner. Although modern vinyl siding masks all but a few of its original pointed arch windows, ornamentation may still survive underneath.

St. Thomas's Religious Society was organized in 1863 by pastors from St. John's Episcopal Church in Charlestown. After seven years of holding worship services in rented quarters the Reverend George W. Durell began to supervise the construction of St. Thomas in Union Square. He hired George W. Trefren & Son to build the church while Zachariah Hancock, a Boston church decorator, frescoed the interior walls. The church ceased to serve as a house of worship around 1960, and for several decades has housed a non-profit social services agency. It has recently returned to its original use, serving an Episcopalian congregation.

J. F. Young Block (ca.1880), 324-328 Somerville Avenue One of Union Square's great strengths is the survival of a remarkable number of late nineteenth century commercial/residential blocks. While commercial centers in the Boston area have long ago lost their vintage business blocks to fire or demolition, Union Square is a virtual museum of late Victorian and early twentieth century commercial properties. Between 1869 and 1891, local entrepreneurs erected no less than seven ambitious, multi-level commercial buildings on the blocks immediately surrounding the junction of Somerville Avenue with Washington and Bow Streets.

This Mansard style commercial/residential block retains its clapboard siding, second story oriel windows, distinctive dormers, as well as most of its slate shingles. Built around 1880 for an owner who evidently lived outside of Somerville, this building may have been entirely residential until the 1910s when a grocer, jeweler and florist are listed as first-floor tenants. The second floor units were occupied by a driver, grocer, carpenter, watchman, fireman and clerk. Mid-20th century tenants included Locke Brothers paper hangers and painters, and the Union Heating and Plumbing Company.

J.A. Bremner & Company building (1910), 344-346 Somerville Avenue



John A. Bremner, a Canadian immigrant who lived nearby at 49 Bow Street, replaced a 19th century shop at 344 Somerville Avenue with the current commercial block. Classical elements such as Corinthian pilasters at either end of the facade and a dentil course at the cornice add architectural interest to this concrete and brick structure. This is an early example of the type of one-story commercial building that was built in Somerville to serve the growing automobile trade. John A. Bremner operated a successful painting and supply business at this address until as late as the 1940s.

As we stroll along the north side of Somerville Avenue, turn right into the driveway adjacent to the center gable Italianate house at 349 Somerville Avenue to view the site of a complex of nineteenth century.

Site of the Albert Sanborn Stables (late 19th century), 347 Somerville Avenue



The Albert Sanborn Stables were originally situated on an interior area encircled by Somerville Avenue and Bow Street. They were replaced during the first quarter of the 20th century by garage/storage facilities for a Model T Ford dealership. Still in evidence is the large forecourt that accommodated the comings and goings of the old horse drawn rental carriages. The space now serves as a warehouse for Riverside Kawasaki motorcycles whose retail store lies in the heart of the Square. The Sanborns were among the oldest families in the Union Square area with roots reaching back to well before the Civil War.

Cyrus A. Bent House (ca.1860) 349 Somerville Avenue

Next door to the Sanborn Stables site is the Cyrus A. Bent House. Somerville embraced this type of center hall/center gable Italianate house in a major way with examples of this house type scattered about the City. At #349, a formal, center pavilion-like effect is achieved via the treatment of the second story as a boxy, projecting oriel enclosed by a gable roof. Cyrus A. Bent was a superintendent of butchering at a local meat processing company.

Continuing westward to Bow Street and Somerville Avenue, assemble on the traffic island to consider several architecturally significant buildings that collectively provide a fine introduction to the Union Square area.

Drouet Block (1898), 58-68 Bow Street

Together with the Richmond Block at Bow and Wesley Park and the Bennet Block across the street, the Italianate/Queen Anne Drouet Block is part of a remarkable trio of large wooden commercial/residential buildings at the western end of Union Square. Here the massive form and rhythmic repetition of ornate window surrounds on a prominent corner building underscore the significance of this structure at one gateway to Union Square. The Drouet and the Richmond were built as apartment hotels by E. Charles Drouet, a Somerville realtor,



from designs provided by Aaron Gould, a native of Nova Scotia, who learned the carpenter's trade. His public buildings in Somerville included designs for the 1895 Central Fire Station, 1898 City Stables and Water Department, and the 1898 Martin W. Carr Elementary School on Spring Hill.

Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station (ca.1925), 69-71 Bow Street

This diminutive brick Colonial Revival-style structure was built during the mid 1920s. Its white washed walls rest on a concrete foundation capped by a slate hip roof, with a square cupola atop the center. This station is another example of a wave of automobile-related buildings constructed in the Union Square area during the early 20th century. During the late 1920s the number of filling stations jumped from four in 1927 to fourteen by 1929. Oil entrepreneur Henry Latham Doherty established the Cities Service Company in 1910 as a supplier to public utilities that soon entered the oil refining business (Citgo Company History). By 1933, a small node of automobile-related commercial concerns had joined this tiny filling station which by that time rubbed elbows with a large auto repair shop and a ten-stall garage at the rear.



No longer in evidence are two gas tanks that once stood in front of the building.

Bennett Block (1892-1893), 380 Somerville Avenue



Together with the Richmond Block at Bow and Wesley Street and the Drouet Block across the street, this Italianate/Queen Anne Bennett Block is also noteworthy for its interesting form and profuse ornamentation. Built in 1892-1893, probably from designs inspired by Aaron Gould, this building features a rich inventory of original features including store window surrounds, bowed and polygonal oriel windows and saw cut brackets at the window lintels and roof cornice. Of a particular note are the roof's free standing gables whose sole purpose is to add interest to the roof line. The Bennett Block's original owner operated a plumbing company, located behind the building on Carlton Street.

Star Theatre (ca.1890), 374 Somerville Avenue Built as a Post Office, this rectangular, vaguely Queen Anne masonry building contained the Star Theatre from 1908-1914. It was one of 14 theatres that operated in Somerville between 1908 and 1940, with only the Somerville Theatre (1914) in Davis Square remaining as a movie and performance venue. The Star Theatre advertised "Motion Pictures and Refined Vaudeville" under the "Big Star". It was a classic nickelodeon-style theatre with cheap tickets and programming targeted to young audiences. Over time the building has housed a dry goods store, Salvation Army, and more recently a Brazilian Restaurant, auto glass repair shop, and now two retail stores, Grand and Poor Little Rich Girl one the first floor and architectural offices above.

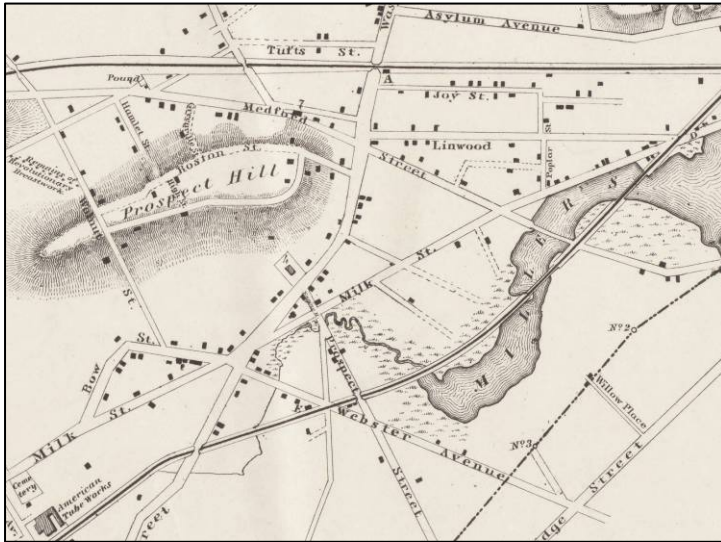
Crossing to the south side of Somerville Avenue walk eastward back into the center of the Square.

The last three buildings on the tour have significant historical associations with Patrick Rafferty. Born ca. 1814, Rafferty was an Irish immigrant who apparently came to the Boston area during the mid nineteenth century and by the 1870s owned a considerable number of properties in the Union Square area, including a funeral home on the north side of Somerville Avenue, at the corner of Church Street. He is listed in the Somerville Directories of the late 1880s and early 1890s as an undertaker and an agent for the sale of lots. He was Overseer of the Poor with Clark Bennett in 1870 and a Common Counselman for Ward 2 from 1872-1876.

The Patrick Rafferty Block (ca.1880), 318-322 Somerville Avenue Representing a late example of an Italianate commercial block the Rafferty Building is constructed of wood and retains bracketed lintels at the second story. The commercial tenants listed here in the 1920s and 1930s included a dry goods store and a cash market. By 1940 one of the storefronts was occupied by a florist.

Rafferty -Wasserman Shop (ca.1890/ca.1920), 314-316 Somerville Avenue Built in two stages around 1890 and 1920, this one-story commercial building, the earliest know occupant of #314 was by a steam and gas fitting business owned by Leavis and Doherty. By the mid 1920s, the recently constructed #316 housed a produce market and a fish market. From 1929 until as late as the early 1990s, the family of Russian immigrant, Joseph Wasserman, operated the produce market.

Patrick Rafferty Row House (ca.1880), 318 R Somerville Avenue Situated behind Rafferty's commercial properties at 314-322 Somerville Avenue, Rafferty built three row houses on a narrow alley. This trio of row houses is very intact, retaining its clapboards, bracketed door hoods, and deep bracketed roof eaves. They were originally numbered 1, 3, and 5 May Place in City directories during the first half of the nineteenth century, with the residents' occupations listed as a clerk, longshoreman, tube-maker, and iron worker. In the early twentieth century residents appeared to be of Irish and Portuguese heritage.



The Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC), as part of the Arts Union Grant Project of the Somerville Arts Council, produced this brochure.

Established in 1985, the Historic Preservation Commission administers historic districts, advises homeowners, provides historic and technical information, and is an arm of City government. The Commission also sponsors events and develops programs and written materials as part of its public outreach and educational mission. Its Staff can be reached via 617.625.6600 ext. 2500 or www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation

ArtsUnion is a project designed to boost the cultural economic development of Union Square, Somerville. The project is shepherded by the Somerville Arts Council, working in collaboration with numerous local organizations, artists, businesses and community members. The Project is expected to spark community-wide excitement about the Square, as well as create new economic opportunities for local artists. Over time the project is expected to strengthen the regional identity and long-term appeal of Union Square. ArtsUnion is funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and its John and Abigail Adams Arts Program.

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Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation