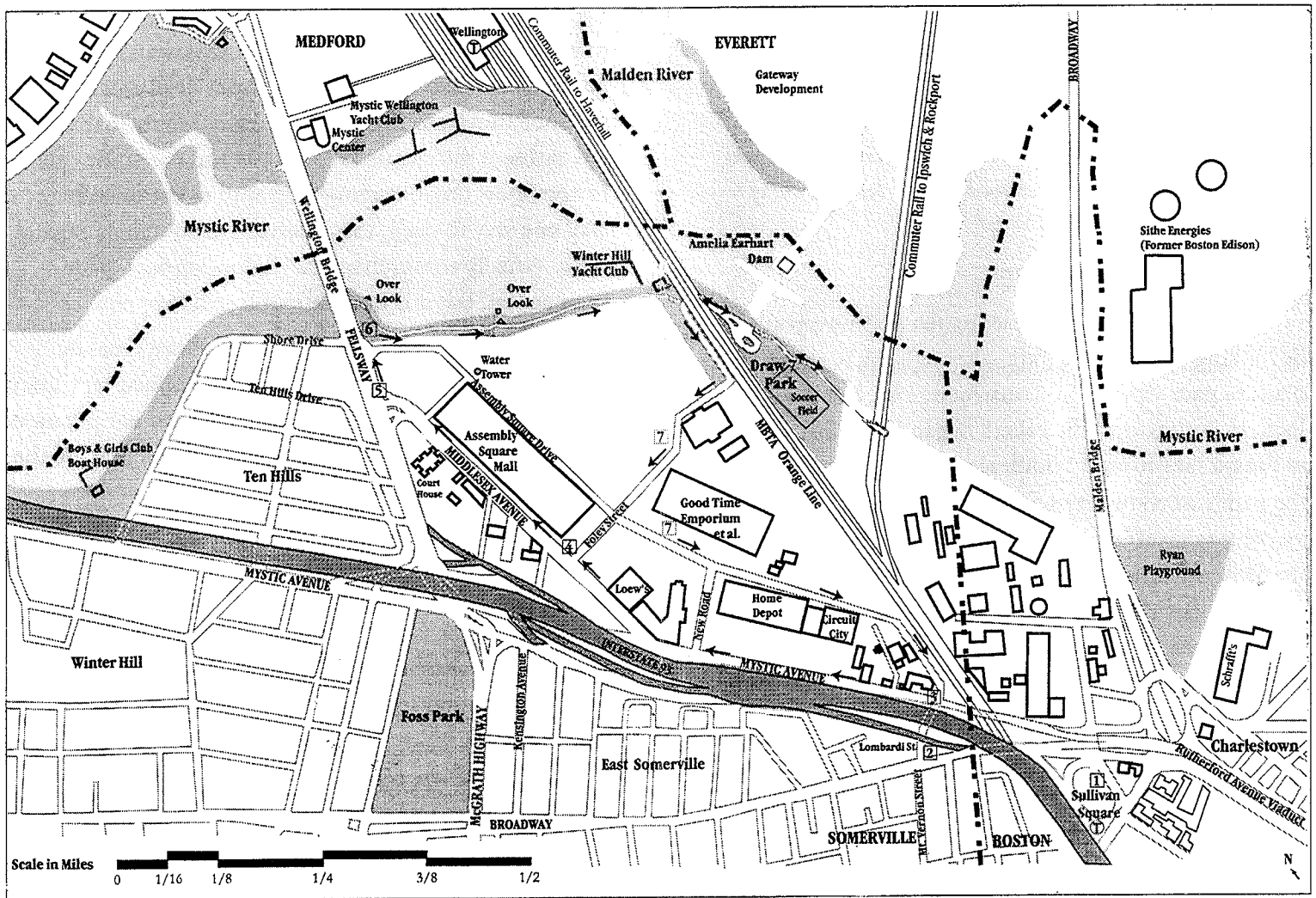


ASSEMBLY SQUARE AND THE MYSTIC RIVERFRONT, SOMERVILLE



Key to Map

1. Tour Start at Sullivan Square
2. Mt. Benedict
3. Mystic Avenue
4. Middlesex Avenue
5. The Fellsway and Ten Hills
6. Mystic River
7. Foley Street and Assembly Square Drive

Public Transportation to Sullivan Square Station

Sullivan Square Station is located on the MBTA Orange Line and is also served by the following bus routes:

- 86 Cleveland Circle via Harvard/Johnston Gate - Sullivan Square
- 89 Clarendon Hill - Sullivan Square via Broadway
- 90 Davis Square - Wellington Station via Sullivan Square and Assembly Mall
- 91 Central Square, Cambridge, via Washington Street - Sullivan Square
- 92 Assembly Square Mall - Downtown via Sullivan Square, Main Street and Haymarket
- 93 Downtown via Bunker Hill Street & Haymarket - Sullivan Square
- 95 West Medford - Sullivan Square via Mystic Avenue
- 101 Malden Center Station - Sullivan Square via Broadway and Salem and Main Streets
- 104 Malden Center Station - Sullivan Square via Ferry Street and Broadway
- 105 Malden Center Station - Sullivan Square via Faulkner and Main Streets
- 109 Linden Square - Sullivan Square via Broadway and Everett Square

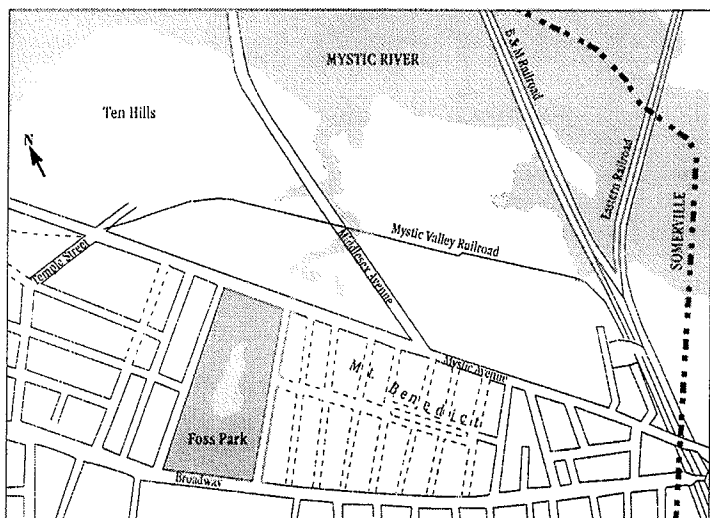
For details of schedules and routes, call the T's information line or check their web site: www.mbta.com

Somerville's Crosstown Shuttle also serves Assembly Square, but it does not stop at Sullivan Square. The Shuttle operates Monday to Friday 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The stop is in front of the Assembly Square Mall. For more information, call 666-6757.

At this point, the tour reaches a breaking point. You may choose to turn right at the end of the building, follow the building to its end, and turn right again if you would like a break. Refreshments are available in the Mall, or you may choose to catch a bus at the stop in front of the building and come back another time. To continue the tour, follow Middlesex Avenue to the Fellsway, bearing right at the intersection. To rejoin the tour after a break, follow the mall entrance drive to the Fellsway, being careful of cars.

The Fellsway and Ten Hills

If you face to your left along the Fellsway, you will be looking toward Foss Park, although the highway will obscure your view of it. Construction of Broadway Park, as it was originally called, began in 1872 at a bend in the no longer used Middlesex Canal. The building of the park was controversial – some objected to the location as insufficiently central, others objected to the site as poorly drained, and others objected to spending public money on land that could be used for private development. The park was dedicated in 1876. An 1879 map makes clear that the park was not connected to the Mystic River.



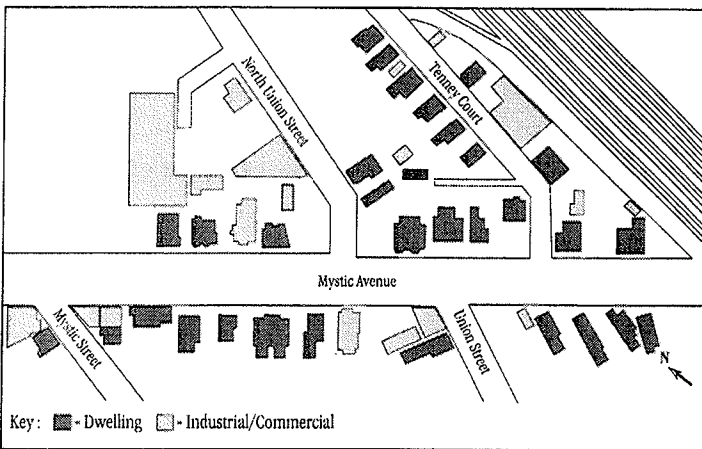
Foss Park and vicinity, 1879

were primarily industrial and commercial, with a number of truck- and auto- related businesses, even before the highway went through. Kensington Avenue still does provide a link for pedestrians, with crosswalks over I-93 entrance and exit ramps. The broader dead end is a piece of McGrath Highway, an arterial route that was cut through the city in 1925. A 1993 traffic study called for reconnecting this remaining stub to the main highway as a way to make the approach to Assembly Square more visually comprehensible and to improve pedestrian access, but it is unclear if this will happen.

The last dead end is Cummings Street, recently renamed Memory Lane in honor of a popular restaurant and bar that opened in 1936 and continued in operation until it was destroyed by fire in 1992. At the time of the fire, the *Somerville Journal* described it as "... a Somerville landmark that could boast of serving presidents, congressmen, gangsters and sports hall of famers." A piece of Cummings Street has been purchased from the city by a developer who is beginning work on a project that calls for the construction of a seven-story hotel and a separate restaurant.

The large brick building on your right, starting at Foley Street, is the former Ford Motor assembly plant, the reason for the Assembly Square name. The Ford plant was built in 1926, at roughly the same time as McGrath Highway and the First National plant, on filled wetlands. The initiative for the development of the Ford and First National sites came from the Boston & Maine Railroad, which owned the land and built rail spurs to the plants. The arrival of the Ford plant was a major event, commemorated by a special supplement to the *Somerville Journal*. The building was notable for its use of natural daylight and was apparently also of interest from the outside. Older Somerville residents recall that a long line of windows along Middlesex Avenue allowed passersby to watch the progress of cars moving along the assembly line and also remember a well-tended landscape. The plant was expanded in 1937 but was shut down in 1958, after having been converted to production of the ill-fated Edsel. First National purchased the building later in 1958. The building was shortened when it was converted to the Assembly Square Mall in 1980, but the monitor roof was retained and used to light the Mall.

Notice the solid wall on the left side of Mystic Avenue. Before the highway was built, a number of small streets ran through here, and there were houses and commercial buildings on both sides of the road. A large number of houses and businesses to the south of Mystic Avenue were removed for highway construction. After the highway was built, the character of the area changed from mixed use to mostly commercial and industrial. On the other side of the Fellsway, a number of homes and businesses north of Mystic Avenue had to be removed to make way for I-93. In that case, highway construction caused the area north of Mystic Avenue to change from a residential/commercial mix to strictly residential.



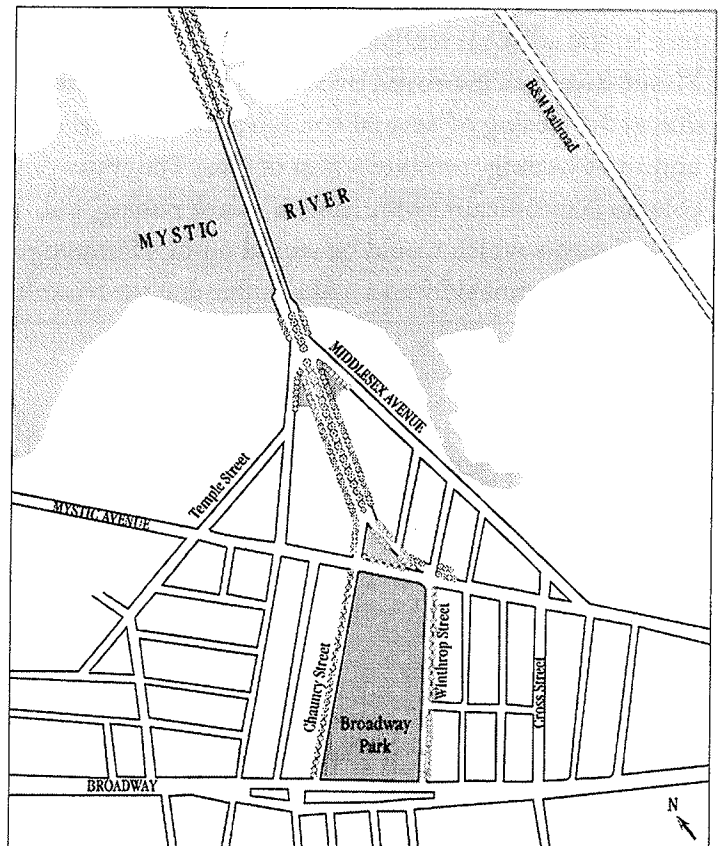
Mystic Avenue near the Boston line, 1947

Cross Assembly Square Drive and continue along Mystic Avenue, being careful of cars entering the parking lots in front of Home Depot and Circuit City. Cross New Road, and continue past the office building, following the road as it forks right for Middlesex Avenue. This whole area, from Circuit City to Loew's, was formerly occupied by a vast First National Stores warehouse complex, built in 1927. When First National closed its operations in 1976, the city lost over a thousand jobs. New Road and Assembly Square Drive were laid out in 1979 as part of an effort to revitalize the area after the departure of First National and were closely tied to the development of the office building and theater. Home Depot and Circuit City came later, in 1991-1992.

Middlesex Avenue

Keep walking along Middlesex Avenue. You will notice several dead end streets on your left that used to connect to the East Somerville street grid. These streets

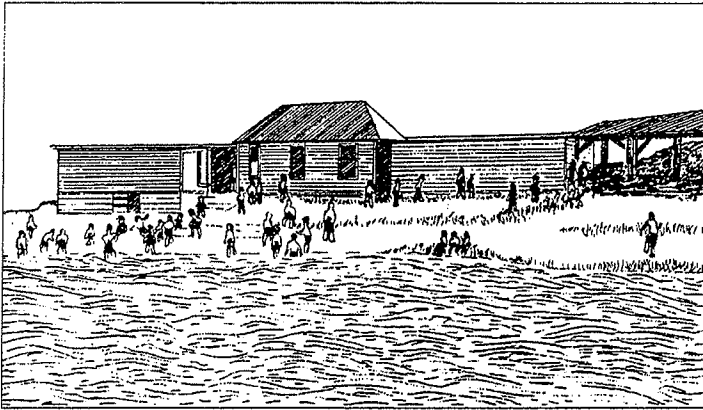
As the idea of park systems linked by parkways became popular later in the nineteenth century, the Mystic River began to be linked to park plans. A plan by the Olmsted firm showed the Fellsway, built in 1897, as a tree-lined link between Broadway Park and the Mystic River. For a time, public transportation reinforced the network of parks connected by parkways: from 1910 to 1946 there was a trolley from Sullivan Square that ran along the median strip of the Fellsway to the Middlesex Fells Reservation and on to Stoneham.



Detail of Olmsted plan for the Fellsway, 1895

The neighborhood on the other side of the Fellsway is known as Ten Hills. The site of Governor John Winthrop's house in the seventeenth century and of Captain Robert Temple's elegant mansion in the eighteenth century, Ten Hills was reduced to clay pits for brickmaking in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In 1900 the Metropolitan Park Commission, the forerunner of the MDC, acquired land along the Mystic River in Ten Hills and built Shore Drive. A portion of the shore became a popular bathing beach, with a wooden bath house built by the City of Somerville between 1906 and 1908, side by side with continued industrial uses of the riverfront. Houses began to be built in Ten Hills after World War I. A planned amusement park did not take shape, but a new bath house was built some time between 1925 and 1947. Ultimately the beach was closed due to water pollution attributed at the time to the adjacent rendering plant. Water quality in the Mystic River has improved over the last twenty years due to the closing of several combined sewer overflows; improved herring runs are a sign of this. The water column is technically swimmable if it is not raining, but the sediments which would be stirred up by swimming are probably unhealthy and make swimming inadvisable.



Somerville Bath House and Beach, ca. 1912

Today all of the riverfront land along Shore Drive is owned by the MDC. There was a bit of political drama involved in the acquisition of one portion of this land: in 1966 the MDC acquired one parcel secretly by eminent domain just as a developer was about to present plans for a high rise apartment complex to the Somerville Planning Board. Most city politicians were upset by the taking, but residents who attended a hearing afterwards were overwhelmingly in favor of the MDC's action.

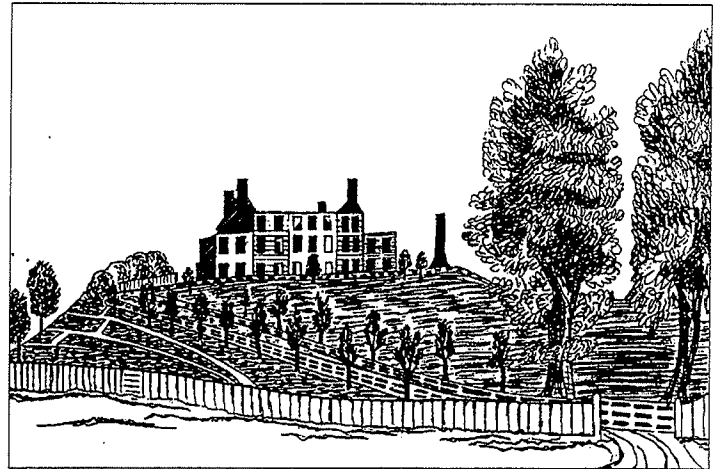
Mystic River

Turn to your right and walk along the Fellsway toward the Mystic River. Stop when you come to the Blessing of the Bay historic marker. The land in this area on both sides of the Mystic River was owned by Governor Winthrop at the beginning of English colonization of Massachusetts, and the Blessing of the Bay,

Mt. Benedict

Take the sidewalk to your left, following the road as it curves around under I-93. Notice the railroad tracks underneath — they are the Orange Line and two commuter rail routes — the Haverhill line and the Ipswich/Rockport line (which now continues to Newburyport). Keep walking straight under the highway until you reach Mt. Vernon St. Stop and look diagonally across the intersection.

There used to be a hill on the other side, known as Ploughed Hill or Mt. Benedict. During the Revolutionary War, the hill was the site of artillery defending the Mystic River from the British. Later it was the site of an Ursuline convent that conducted a school for girls from prosperous families. An angry mob, incited by rumors of a captive teacher, looted and burned the convent in 1834; the ruins remained as a landmark until the hill was taken down for use as fill in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This section of the city is still referred to as the Nunnery Grounds.

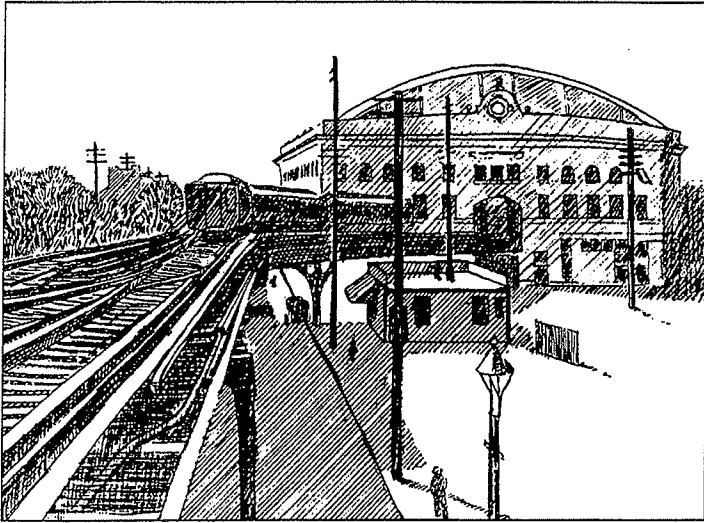


Ruins of the Ursuline Convent

Mystic Avenue

Turn right and cross Broadway at the pedestrian light. This puts you on Lombardi Street, which passes under the highway. Keep walking through the tunnel to Mystic Avenue. Cross Mystic Avenue at the light. Look down Mystic Avenue in the direction of traffic flow. Mystic Avenue follows the route of an early toll road, the Medford Turnpike, built in 1804. Unlike the Middlesex Canal, the toll road was not an example of engineering skill; it was poorly constructed and later abandoned. The road crossed the canal a few hundred yards down from here.

station was built to serve both streetcars and the Main Line El, the new rapid transit line connecting Sullivan Square and Dudley Square by way of downtown Boston. As you continue to stand with your back to the current T station, the 1901 station stood on what is now an empty lot on the other side of the elevated roadway in front of you, near the opening used by the buses struggling to exit the current station parking area. The elevated trains were replaced by the current Orange Line in the 1970s; today's Sullivan Station opened in 1975.



Sullivan Square Station in 1901

While the elevated trains have come down, overhead structures are very much part of today's dominant transportation mode — automobile highways. If you look up while facing the T station, the structure you see above is I-93. This portion of the highway was built in the 1970s. Off to the left as you face the station, a new ramp is under construction. Turning around again, the crumbling elevated roadway in front of you is the Rutherford Avenue Viaduct, which carries traffic over Sullivan Square between Mystic Avenue/Broadway in Somerville and Rutherford Avenue in Charlestown. The Rutherford Avenue Viaduct may be taken down in the future, after the Central Artery/Tunnel project is completed. In the short term, the City of Boston plans to repair it and keep it open. The recently released report of the Rutherford Avenue Corridor Study calls for changes to the Sullivan Square traffic pattern that should improve vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle access and upgrade the physical quality of Sullivan Square in the future.

the first sea-going vessel built in Massachusetts, was launched here on July 4, 1631. The Medford side of the Mystic River later became an important shipbuilding area, using timber shipped from New Hampshire on the Middlesex Canal. Between 1803 and 1873 there were ten shipyards along the then-meandering Mystic River, and Medford acquired a reputation as a center for the building of clipper ships.

Looking across the Mystic River at the bridge, you can see two pieces of parkland on the Medford side, to the left and right of the bridge. If you have time, take the bridge over; there is a pedestrian light on the Fellsway that will let you cross over and explore the land on both sides of the bridge in Medford. In the 1960s, the Mystic River was dredged and straightened in connection with the construction of I-93. The natural-looking area to the left of the bridge was actually constructed on hydraulic dredge spoils from this operation. On the right side of the bridge, the Mystic Wellington Yacht Club and the Mystic Center office building, with its manicured lawns, are on land formerly occupied by an MBTA yard.

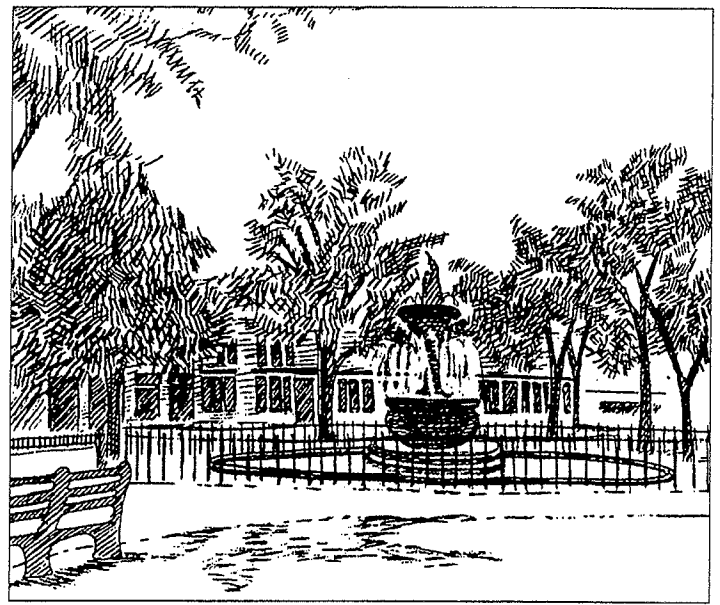
Returning to the Somerville side of the Mystic River, follow the asphalt path that goes along the water's edge. This path was built by the MDC in the 1970s. This land could function as a continuation of MDC parkland along Shore Drive in Ten Hills, but the Fellsway is difficult to cross. (There is a pedestrian light, but it requires taking a jog away from the shoreline.) The city has plans to build an undercarriage at the bridge to make it easier for pedestrians and bicycles to have continuous access at the shore, but it is not known when funding will be available to carry out this project.

There are two observation platforms on this path, one close to the bridge, the other a little farther along. The second platform is close to the site of a former petroleum dock that supplied the area's industries. As you follow the path, you will come to a gray building on your left — the private Winter Hill Yacht Club. The existing facility is a somewhat scaled-down version of an ambitious project proposed in 1966 that called for an outdoor swimming pool, barbecue pit, skating rink and tennis courts in addition to a substantial club house and boating facilities. Follow the path past the Yacht Club and under the railroad tracks. This will lead you to the Amelia Earhart Dam and Draw 7 Park.

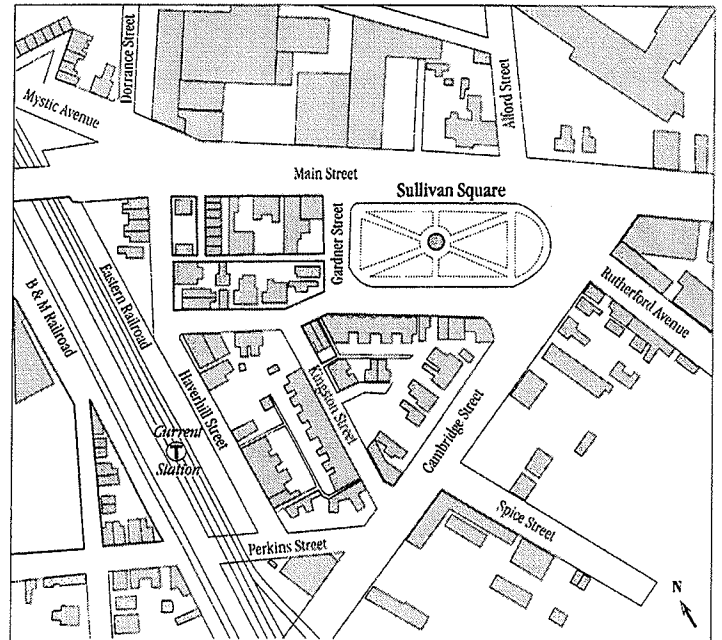
Legislation authorizing the MDC to build the Amelia Earhart Dam was passed in 1957. The purpose of the dam was to maintain the river at a constant depth (it was said to fluctuate tidally between 0 and 13 feet deep) and to eliminate basement flooding in low-lying areas near the river. It was also expected that reclaimed land along the river could be used to support a highway (what later became I-93) and that the changes in the river banks would lead to improved recreational opportunities. A companion bill filed with the dam legislation called for the creation of a Mystic River recreational area comparable to the Charles River Basin. While this bill appears not to have been enacted, the MDC Commissioner referred to the Charles River esplanade as a model when justifying the MDC's 1966 taking of land on Shore Drive. Publicity released as construction of the dam was beginning described the project as the third facility of its type in the world, the other two being the Charles River Basin and the Alster Basin in Hamburg, Germany. Actual construction of the dam took place in the 1960s; a pumping station connected with the dam was completed in 1976 and provides additional help in discharging storm runoff and preventing flooding in high tides.

Draw 7 Park was built by the MDC and the MBTA at the urging of the city of Somerville in 1992. Draw 7 was the name of a draw bridge previously on this site, in existence since the 1840s. The soccer field was originally used by the city's youth soccer program, but it proved to be unsuited to their needs. (The site is windy and noisy, balls get lost in the river, and there are no telephones or restrooms near by.) The city has discussed potential park improvement with the MDC.

If you look across the water upstream from the dam, you can see the mouth of the Malden River. The cities of Malden, Medford and Everett have joined forces to plan a center for the telecommunications industry on former industrial land straddling the Malden River. Environmental groups are working together to push for continuous natural parkland along the Malden River connected to MDC properties on the Mystic River. Just across the Mystic River at the Malden River mouth, a shopping mall is planned for the site formerly occupied by the Monsanto chemical company. Remediation at this site is nearing completion.



Sullivan Square in the late 19th century, with a fountain in the middle.

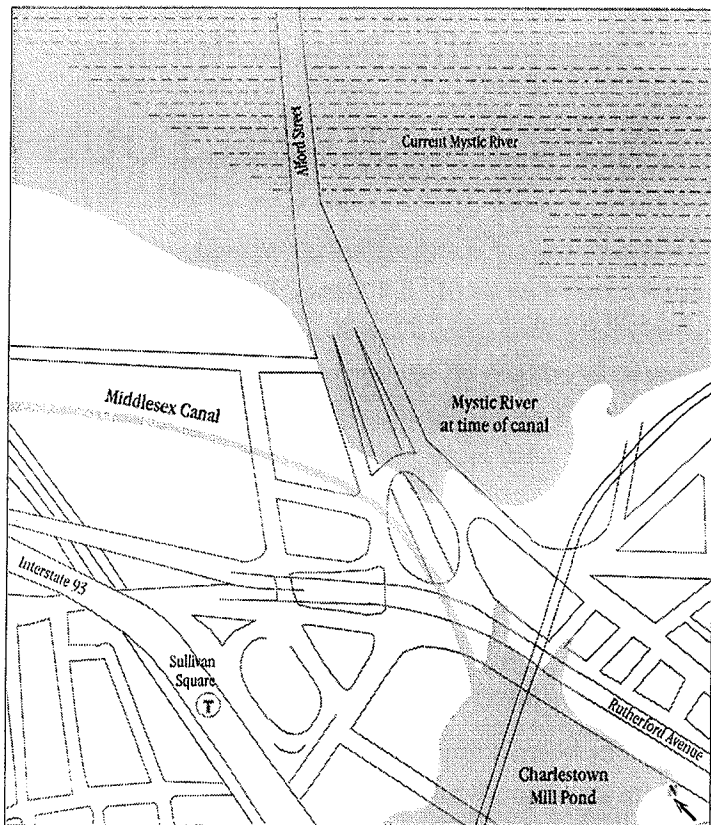


Sullivan Square in 1885

The present T station is located on the old Boston and Maine corridor, but the Sullivan Square green and the small residential blocks to the east of the railroad disappeared in the twentieth century as the result of changes in transportation networks.

The next transportation revolution to make its way through Sullivan Square was the streetcar. Horsecars connecting Somerville to Charlestown and Boston started running in 1858, just two years after the first horsecar in Massachusetts connected Cambridge and Boston. Horsecar travel continued to grow until the early 1890s, when electrically powered street railways became popular. Sullivan Square came to be the location of a large carhouse, and in 1901 a grand new

Cambridge Street. There were two Sullivans closely associated with the canal: James Sullivan, governor of Massachusetts from 1807 until his death in 1808, was the first president of the Middlesex Canal Corporation, and his son, John Langdon Sullivan, was appointed superintendent of the canal in 1808.



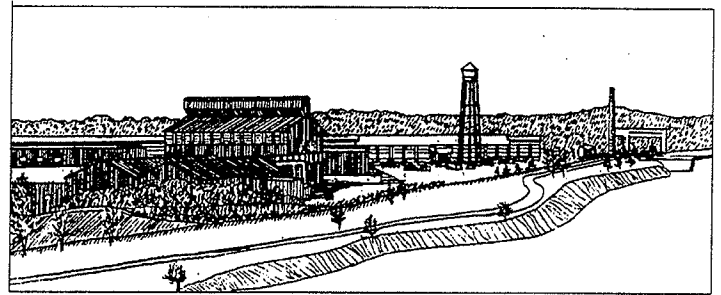
The Middlesex Canal superimposed on a modern street plan

While we hear of the Middlesex Canal today primarily for its value in transporting freight, the canal was also used for pleasure trips. An amusement area was even built on Horn Pond, Woburn, to cater to tourists on the canal.

By facilitating the transport of the materials needed to build a railroad, the canal helped put itself out of business. The Boston and Lowell Railroad, completed in 1835, captured much of the freight business, and the canal ceased operation by 1853. The Boston and Lowell and the Fitchburg Railroads, the earliest railroads to pass through Somerville, did not come through this area of the city, but in 1842 the Boston and Maine Railroad opened a station near Sullivan Square. This led to the construction of a residential enclave for commuters to Boston. New streets were laid out, such as Mt. Vernon Street and Mt. Pleasant Street, and small lots were plotted out along them.

Foley Street and Assembly Square Drive

Walk back toward the Winter Hill Yacht Club, and turn left on Foley Street, the paved roadway that runs parallel to the Orange Line tracks and then takes a bend to the right. The land in front of you was occupied by heavy industry until recently – machine products and petroleum uses. The factories have been taken down and the land has been partly cleaned up, but it is not currently suited for uses that involve high contact with people. Plans are nearing completion for upgrading streets and utilities in this area. Future development in this area will include facilities to accommodate enhanced public access to the riverfront.

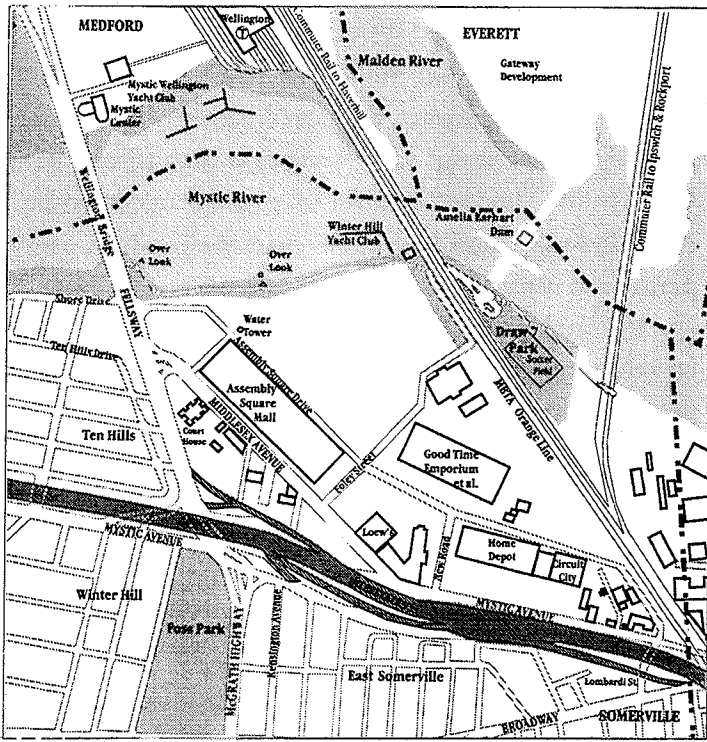


Former industrial buildings, as seen from the river in the 1970s

Keep walking down Foley Street until it intersects with Assembly Square Drive. You will pass the Central Steel Company, a long-standing industrial use. In the forties it was called L.E. Zurbach Steel Co. Turn left on Assembly Square Drive. The building on the corner to your left was at one time a warehouse for Sears and Roebuck; it is now occupied by several businesses, including commercial uses such as the World Gym and Good Time Emporium. There is a nine acre tract of land in the rear of this area that the city is in the process of acquiring from the MBTA.

Continue along Assembly Square Drive. Land uses continue to evolve on either side of the roadway. For example, a former oil company property is now used by USA Waste for truck storage.

When you get to the end of Assembly Square Drive, you will come to the beginning of the tour loop at Mystic Avenue. Retrace your initial steps (cross under the highway by way of Lombardi Street) to return to Sullivan Station. Alternatively, you may turn around and walk back on Assembly Square Drive toward Foley Street to the bus stop for the 90 or 92 bus. The Crosstown Shuttle can be boarded at the Assembly Square Mall MBTA stop.



Assembly Square and the Mystic Riverfront

This pamphlet was written and produced by Lynn McWhood and Jane Sauer for the Mystic View Site Task Force with assistance from Todd Fontanella of the Somerville Office of Community Development. Published in April 1999.

The Mystic View Site Task Force is a group of individuals from varying backgrounds who are working together to educate, involve, and inform residents of Somerville about development and city planning, particularly in relation to the Assembly Square/Mystic Riverfront area.

For more information about the Mystic View Site Task Force, check our web site:

www.the-ville.com/mvstf.html

Or, call Lawrence Paoella, (617) 628-8126.

The Mystic View Site Task Force gratefully acknowledges financial support for the publication and distribution of this tour guide from Heiner Lingemann, a visitor from Germany who purchased a winning lottery ticket in Somerville.

Assembly Square and the Mystic Riverfront Somerville, Massachusetts A SELF-GUIDED TOUR

This tour consists of a loop beginning and ending at Sullivan Square Station on the MTBA Orange Line. The entire loop covers roughly three miles; it may be broken into two smaller segments by breaking off at Assembly Square Mall. For truly sturdy hikers, an additional loop across Wellington Bridge and into the park lands on the Medford side of the river is also possible.

A map of the entire route and information on getting to Sullivan Square by public transportation are found in the center section of this guide.

Sullivan Square and Transportation Changes

Why begin a tour of Somerville in Boston? Sullivan Square stands on what was once a narrow neck of land between Charlestown and “Charlestown Beyond the Neck” – the present Somerville. Being in a narrow place between larger land masses made Sullivan Square a place where transportation routes naturally converged, and various transportation facilities developed here over the years. Changes in the transportation routes and facilities in Sullivan Square have had and will continue to have an important impact on the evolution of the Assembly Square/Mystic Riverfront area.

As you face the upper level of Sullivan Station, look for the Middlesex Canal commemorative plaque to the right of the entrance. The Middlesex Canal was a major engineering accomplishment in its day, and it helped establish industry in this country by making possible the development of the early textile mills in Lowell. Completed in 1803, the canal ran from the Merrimack River at Lowell to the Charlestown Mill Pond, from which point goods could be transshipped to Boston. Turn around (with your back to the station): imagine the canal in front of you, cutting through the center traffic island of Sullivan Square; the Charlestown Mill Pond was off to your right, on the other side of