

## “Tracking Progress: How Somerville Yards -- Rail, Stock and Brick -- Have Shaped Union Square”

*Walking Tour researched & led by Ed Gordon, President of the Victorian Society in America, New England Chapter*

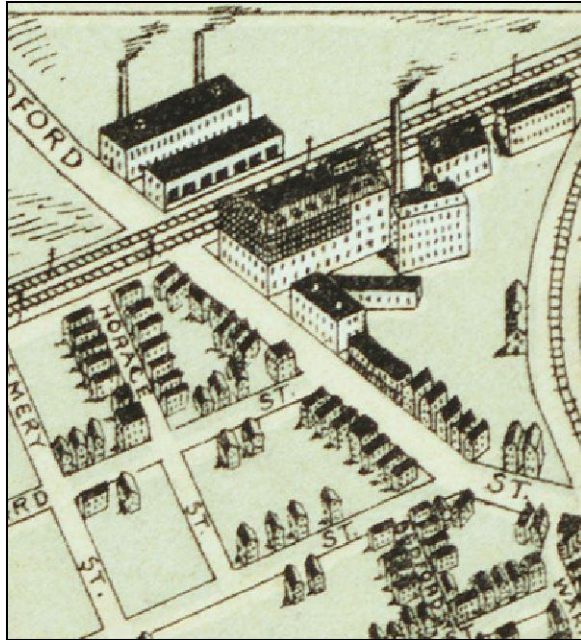
*Sunday, September 25, 2016*

Co-sponsored by the Somerville Arts Council and the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission

### Introduction

Welcome to our newest exploration of the ever changing Union Square Central Business District and neighborhood. The tour boundaries will be Somerville Avenue to the north, Medford Street to the east, the Cambridge border to the south, and Webster Avenue to the west, but also incorporating Clark Street, Lincoln Park and the part of Washington Street west of Webster Avenue.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the southeastern section of Union Square (now generally known by its political nomenclature of Ward II) was an industrial powerhouse. Here one encountered meatpacking factories, a major glass making company, brickyards, woodworking concerns, soap factories and many more industrial spots. While owners and managers experienced prosperity, workers were often faced with low wages and substandard lodging. Local residents also suffered from serious environmental conditions. The noxious smells of animal rendering affected local folks' health, and even caused the paint to peel off their houses! The Miller's River, which once bisected this tour area, became a stagnant catch-basin for the blood and body parts of sheep, hogs and other farm animals. These factors caused Cambridge and Somerville in 1874 to almost completely obliterate the River with fill materials. The adverse conditions of Ward II were so extreme that Lewis Hines (1874-1940) the renowned politically progressive photographer, documented images of daily life along the streets of Medford, South and especially Horace, all of which are on the tour route.



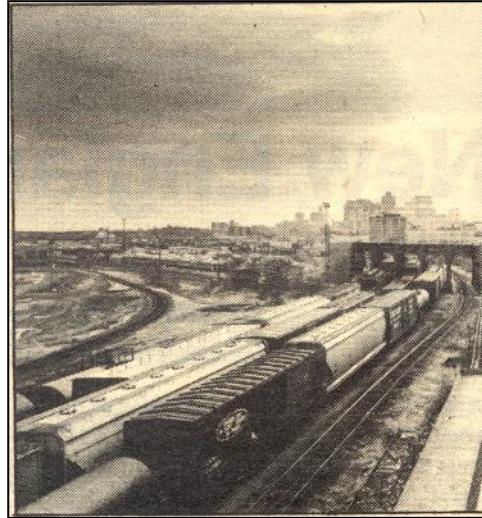
Why tour an area with such a history of adverse conditions and landscape loss? Simply because we learn so much – past history is rich with gems for future planning, and retrospection invites more informed visioning. Today's paved parking lots and big box stores were once sites of once-mighty manufactories and workers' housing that are a key part of the City's cultural heritage. New entries to the area include community gardens run by nonprofit groups, and small businesses launched by young entrepreneurs. These include a brewery with a cafe, recording studios, chocolate makers, and various others reflective of creative industry popping up throughout Somerville, and especially in this area. Some of the industrial businesses from the distant past have not only survived, but thrive to this day, including an over century old auto parts salvage yard and a foundry that produces copper replacement parts for “Old Ironsides” at the Charlestown Navy Yard -- the last of its kind in the Boston area!

The Union Square area has been shaped by many factors over the years, notably Milk Row considered to be a Colonial-era highway, early freight and passenger rail commencing in the 1830s to 1850s, and the now-you-see-it, now-you-don't Miller's River. Somerville Avenue, once known as Milk Row and now forms the northern edge of the tour area, was part of an important system of thoroughfares from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Middlesex County farmers travelled back and forth through Union Square along

this historic corridor, incorporating Elm Street, Somerville Avenue and Washington Street, as they headed toward the markets in City Square, Charlestown and Faneuil Hall in Boston. These “market men” hauled wagons full of agricultural produce -- fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.

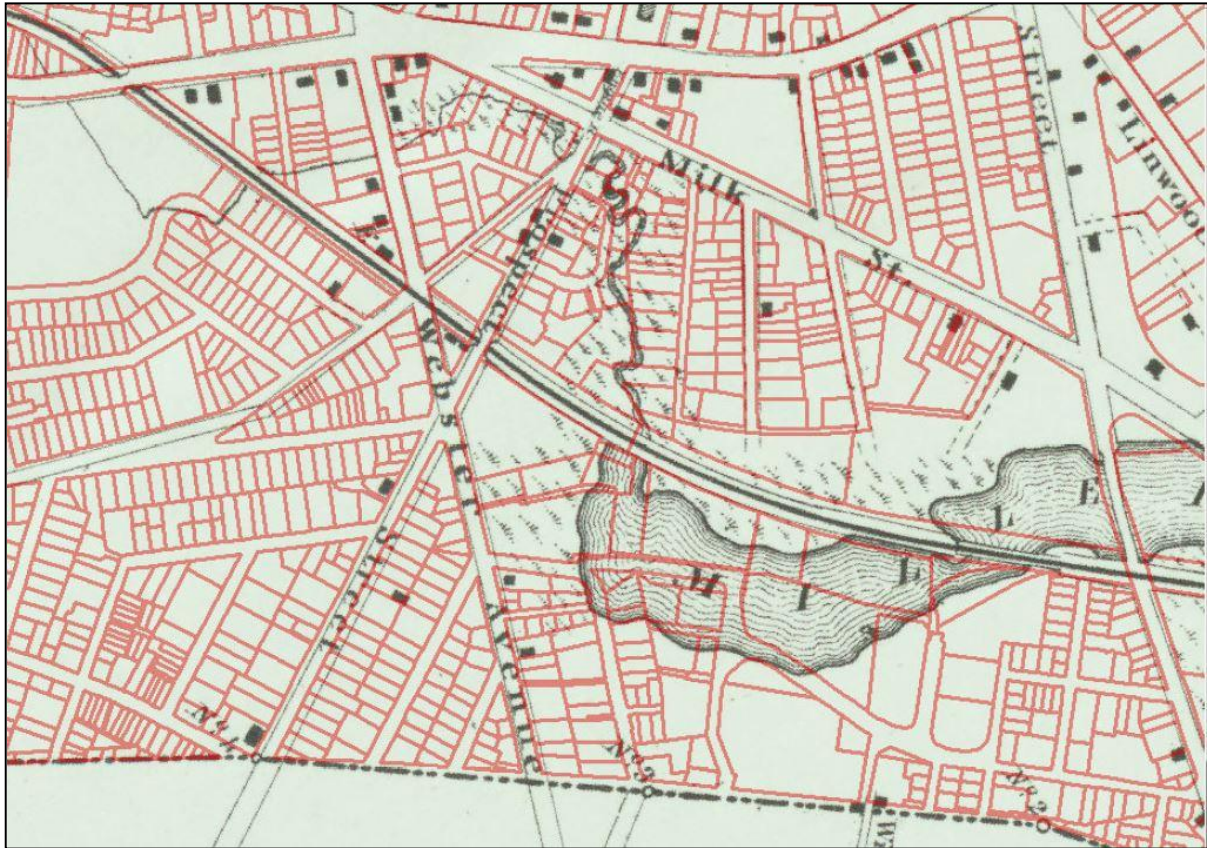
Even before the introduction of the railroads, Union Square was becoming a hub of industry. As early as 1820, the Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works on the western edge of Union Square on Somerville Avenue (currently the site of Conway Park) was said to be the oldest textile finishing plant in the United States. Then the beginning of land-making in the area began around 1830 when some of the Miller’s River wetlands were filled in to accommodate the path of Somerville Avenue between Carleton and Medford Streets. And of course, the arrival of rail lines did play a key role in giving Somerville a distinctive identity as a hub for productive factories near to Boston, which had little land to spare for industrial complexes

The Fitchburg Railroad, introduced to Union Square in the late 1830s, encouraged factory construction and helped pave the way for Somerville’s independence from Charlestown in 1842. It began as a short line built to link the docks at Charlestown with nascent industry in Somerville. Then as early as 1835, the Boston and Lowell Line began service. This linked the hinterlands of Charlestown (later Somerville) with the outside world.



As the tour route will highlight, the north and south sides of the Fitchburg Line were host to many industries. Going from east-to-west these industries included the John P. Squire Meatpacking Company (mostly located in East Cambridge), the Charles North Meatpacking Company, the New England Dressed Meat and Wool Company, Boynton Yards, Union Glass Works and the George Wyatt Brick Company. The success of these regionally and nationally significant enterprises, along with numerous small-to-mid-sized manufacturers, ensured that Union Square would be an important contributor to the commercial success of Somerville well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.





A relatively late development in the railroad's influence shaping the Union Square area was the construction of the Grand Junction Railroad (GJR) in 1855. The GJR Line was built to connect the railroads entering Boston from the north and west with their own depot as well as the wharves in East Boston. The GJR Line was the major reason that John P. Squire set up a slaughter house on the East Cambridge-Somerville border in 1855, as it provided a link with the Boston and Worcester Line that brought livestock from the Midwest to the Somerville meatpackers. The same rail line eventually would deliver packed meat from Somerville factories to the East Boston docks. By the late 1890s, Somerville, with five meat packing concerns, was becoming known as "the Chicago of New England." In fact, by the late 19th century, due in part to its proximity to railroads, Somerville housed the third-largest slaughtering industry in the United States.

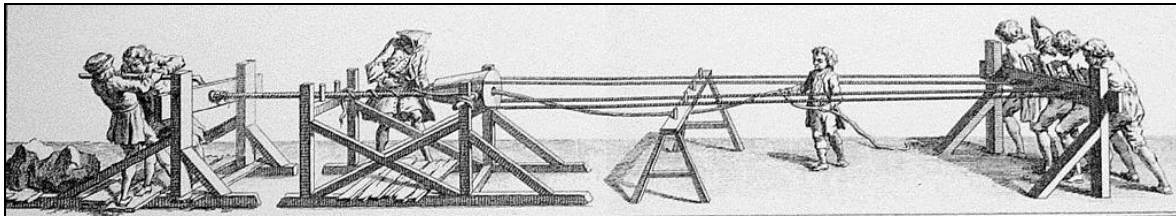
Industry, of course, needs a convenient receptacle to dispose of its waste. This fell to the Miller's River which was variously known as Gibbones Creek and Willets Creek during the 17th and 18th centuries. This waterway once formed a natural boundary between the communities of Somerville and Cambridge. The Miller's River was so picturesque that in the early 1790s, the well-to-do Boston merchant Joseph Barrell commissioned Charles Bulfinch, architect of the Massachusetts State House (1795-1798), to design a mansion for him atop Cobble Hill, just northeast of Medford Street. The construction, however, of John P. Squire's first slaughter house in 1855 on the Cambridge/Somerville line ushered in a dark chapter in the history of Ward II and the River. Over the next twenty years the Miller's River would become an irreversibly polluted waterway. The Squire Company was among its worst industrial offenders, compounded by the waste generated by the poor working families of the area. The condition of Miller's River was so disastrous that it prompted the founding of the Massachusetts Board of Health by the General Court of Massachusetts in 1869. In theory, the flushing action of the river's tides was supposed to dispose of the waste, but this proved inadequate, resulting in riverbanks rife with animal carcasses and the like exposed to the sun at low tide. When petitions against the slaughterhouses and meatpackers failed, the cities of Cambridge and Somerville built sewers in 1874, and largely filled in the river. The Miller's River controversy may be seen as a milestone in the early conservation movement.

*Leave the commercial hub of Union Square and head east on Somerville Avenue, crossing onto Prospect Street.*

**Union Square Garage (1914) at 267-271 Somerville Avenue** 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 circa 1960 overhead doors. The rhythmic repetition of segmental-arched bays at the second story strikes an old fashioned, late 19<sup>th</sup> century note, while the 16 segmental arched windows underscore the horizontal massing of the building. The Garage first appears in the City Directory in 1915 at 269 Somerville Avenue, along with 18 other automobile garages in Somerville.

**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 into fashion around 1850 was still being used in Somerville house design as late as 1890. The intact and ornate bracketed door hood, combined with the paired brackets at the eaves illustrates why the Italianate style is sometimes known as the "bracketed style." The basic rectangular form and minimal Italianate stylistic references of the O’Keefe House are typical of the housing later viewed along Allen, South, Horace, Ward and other nearby streets on the tour.

*From Somerville Avenue, turn right onto **Allen Street (circa 1860s)**, lined with houses primarily of interest for their boxy geometric forms and surviving original (mostly) Italianate features, such as bracketed door hoods, polygonal bays, and end and side gables with return eaves.*



Allen Street was named after Hiram Allen who established his rope walk business in 1839 when the Fitchburg Railroad (originally Charlestown Railroad) first came to the Union Square area. Set out in the 1860s, the street apparently corresponds with, or closely parallels, the site of Allen’s rope making enterprise, as seen on the 1858 McIntyre Map of Boston and Vicinity. His business ran parallel to a section of the Miller’s River. Ropewalks require ample open space on which to build sheds, where hemp was woven into rope. By the late 1830s, ropewalks in Charlestown were folding in favor of residential construction, so Allen saw an opportunity in the ample space that lay just east of Prospect Street. Allen’s mill was tidal-powered as the action of the tides was still a viable source of energy. By 1850, Allen employed 5 men and a horse to power the ropewalk machinery, and his 14 tons of cordage produced that year were valued at \$5,000. A decade later in 1860, Allen employed 8 men and owned 12 tons of foreign hemp valued at \$2,400 and 15 tons of American hemp worth \$2,000. During the 1860s, Allen’s ropewalk was dismantled by the growing demand for house lots in the Union Square area.

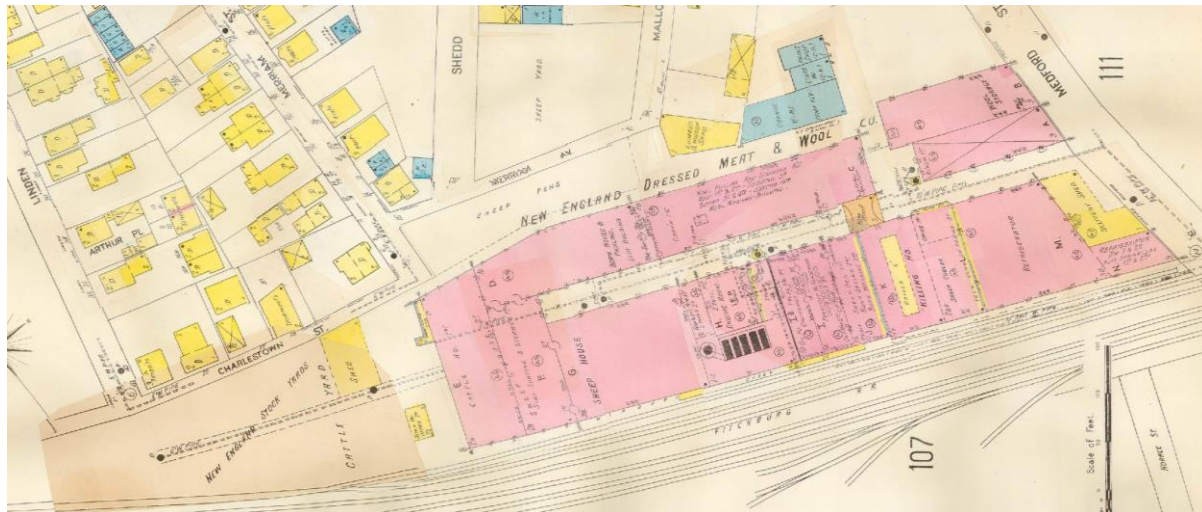
Judging by listings in the Somerville Directories from the late 1860s to the mid-1880s, Allen Street and vicinity were heavily Irish. In 1869, Allen Street’s McDermotts, Mahans, and McKannas were employed as glassblowers and laborers. Some Allen Street residents, however, were probably not Irish, including Terrence Campbell, a laborer; Fred Thomsen, a watchman probably working the night shift in a nearby factory; Fred A. S. Lewis, a tinsmith; and John C. Rowe, a carpenter. By 1881, many heads of household had Irish surnames, such as McLaughlin, Kerrigan, Carrigan, and McVey, whose job descriptions included laborer, brakeman, and teamster. Others, possibly not of Irish heritage, were James Jennings, mason; Nicholas P. Wadden, boot and shoe dealer; and George Reid, “brass foundry.” By 1884, the Kerrigans had been joined on Allen Street by neighbors named Patrick A. Quinn, teamster; J. Allen



Flanders, railroad clerk; Thomas Galvin, laborer; and J.F. Robbins, hack driver.

Situated at 30 Allen Street, the **Allen Street Community Garden** was completed in 2007. This pocket green space has many amenities, including planting beds, sitting areas, and shade trees. Historically part of a close-knit residential neighborhood, this land became vacant in the 1950s and was illegally used as a dumping ground. The City acquired the parcel in 2003, and neighborhood meetings determined that it would be best used for a community garden. Remediation of the lot happened through an EPA Clean-up Grant beginning in January of 2007. It involved replacing three feet of contaminated soil with clean fill and constructing gardening plots on raised-beds. The formerly polluted site now offers space for the community to relax and grow flowers and vegetables, and is one of two ADA-accessible community gardens in the City. The Conservation Commission oversees the City's Community Garden program, and hires a city-wide garden coordinator, establishes polices for the gardens, and continually seeks spots for new gardens as they are in high demand, with long waiting lists for years. They currently oversee nine active community gardens in Somerville.

*From Allen Street turn left to walk along Charlestown Street to the Target parking lot. Along Charlestown Street pass by Linden Street and note that one building appears on the 1852 Martin Draper Map of Somerville. It is still extant though in an altered state on the east side. This 1852 map also indicates that the segment of Merriam Street between Somerville Avenue and Charlestown Street was proposed to be a street. Prior to the 1870s the south side of Charlestown Street bordered the Miller's River wetlands. Then during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries this same area was bordered by wooden animal pens owned by New England Dressed Meat and Wool.*



The **New England Dressed Meat and Wool Company (NEDM&WC)**, founded circa 1890, was an integral part of the “Big Three” Somerville Meatpackers. They specialized in the production of land products, while the Charles North Company was synonymous with pork, and the John P. Squire Company manufactured beef products. The 1884 Atlas of Somerville shows the NEDM&WC site as undeveloped land, but by 1895, it boasted a major industrial presence. The company owned a complex of buildings on a 272,587 square foot parcel bordering the south side of Charlestown Street, plus the area between Charlestown and Medford Streets, currently occupied by Target and other big box stores. Five long, rectangular, wooden structures for housing soon-to-be slaughtered animals were located at regular intervals along Charlestown Street, while to the immediate east was a large brick U-shaped structure. It contained sheep storage, a boiler house/engine room, and cold storage. It overlooked the houses of three no longer extant thoroughfares: Shedd Street, Merriam Avenue and Malloy Court. . By the 1920s, all but one of the wooden sheds had disappeared between the south side of Charlestown Street and the Fitchburg Railroad Tracks—an area labeled “Cattle Yard” on the Sanborn Atlas of 1900-1925. This Atlas shows in greater detail than earlier atlases, how space was used within the large u-shaped building at the



WEST-WARD VIEW OF NORTH PACKING & FREEBORN COMPANY'S WORKS.

head of Merriam Street. These uses included a building that housed cattle, sheep, berm wool storage, pickling, wool pulling and scouring, an engine room, a killing house, a sheep cooler, a large refrigeration room, and a delivery room. The company ceased operations in the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, while its buildings were no longer extant by the late 1920's. The site now hosts several big box stores.

*From the former site of NEDM&WC turn right onto Medford Street, a thoroughfare set out in the early 1800's to provide access to the Craigie Bridge that spanned the Charles River, linking together Boston and Cambridge. Continue onto Medford Street under the railroad bridge and cross over to Medford St.*

At the northeast side of Medford Street consider the surviving buildings of the **Charles H. North Meat Packing Company**, as well as the site of the **John P. Squire Meat Packing Company**, which straddled the Cambridge/Somerville line. The stories of the two companies are inextricably bound together. Each founder, John P. Squire and Charles H. North, started their careers as butchers in Vermont. Squire first came to Boston in 1842, and conducted business from a stall at Faneuil Hall Market. Conversely Charles H. North made his way to Boston in 1862 to work for Squire, who by then was well on his way to being a major figure in the New England meat packing industry. When the Grand Junction Railroad was completed in 1855, Squire decided to assemble a large tract on the Cambridge/Somerville line as now he could buy livestock directly from the Midwest instead of purchasing hogs from Brighton, which was still the animal slaughtering center for New England.

Charles H. North built a slaughterhouse next door to Squire's company at the prime intersection of the Fitchburg and Grand Junction railroads. In 1878, his meat packing complex burned to the ground, and the following year, architect T.B. Webster built him a new plant on twelve acres. The new and improved North facility could butcher 5,000 hogs a day and employed 1,000 men. This large, T-shaped, Webster designed building of 1879 is no longer extant.

Two still-standing buildings, however, do provide some substantial physical evidence of Somerville's great late 19<sup>th</sup> century meatpacking industry: North's buildings at **35-37 Medford Street** and **37 (Rear) Medford Street**. Judging from the 1884 and 1895 Somerville Atlases, 35-37 Medford Street was not part of the post-fire rebuilding of the North complex. Rather, the 1884 atlas shows that a handful of wooden



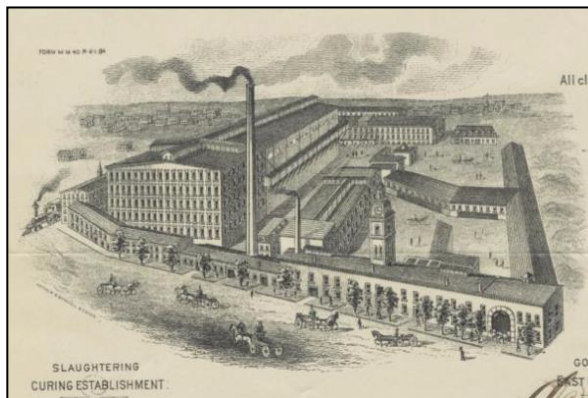
structures occupied this site, and by 1895 the current building is depicted. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century this building included offices, while a wheelwright and blacksmith shop occupied a segment near the intersection of Medford and Gore Streets. They are no longer extant. The Medford Street façade of this impressive three-story building is punctuated by arched openings on the first floor. Piers vertically divide the main façade into a succession of bays. The center bay has a stable entrance with original paneled wooden doors on the first floor.



Behind 35-37 Medford Street, **37 R Medford Street** is an unusually well-detailed, three-story, yellow brick industrial building with a corbelled cornice exhibiting a tab and cross pattern. The front part of the building dates to 1913, while the rear section is probably a free-standing building shown on the 1895 Somerville Atlas. The building was used as a smoke house and also a pickling and packing facility. By 1895 the North Company's Medford Street complex encompassed 355,785 square feet bordering Medford Street. By circa 1885-1890 it had expanded to the west, taking over 165,362 square feet of the former Boynton Yards complex off of

South Street. The North buildings today include the offices of design firms and moving companies.

*Head southeast on Medford Street and round the corner of 35-37 Medford Street to view the Mill Brook Loft apartment building at 9 Medford Street that stands on part of the **J.P. Squire Meat Packing Plant**.*



As previously noted John P. Squire began his meat packing career in the Boston area during the 1840s and set up his East Cambridge/Somerville operation in 1855. By 1874 the *Cambridge Chronicle* described the magnitude of his meatpacking operation. "By that time 60-to-120 car loads of hogs from Chicago and points west arrived by train at Squire's yard and hog shed. Vast quantities of blood were spilled during the process of slaughtering 1,500 to 1,800 hogs per day. Along with blood, scalding water, skin and entrails were dumped into Miller's River." By 1890, the *Arlington Advocate* described

Squire's Company as the largest hog-packing company under the control of one family, and in 1896 it was recognized as the largest company of its kind in the country. John P. Squire died in 1893 and the company was carried on less successfully by his sons Frank O. and Fred F. Squire. Squire Meat Packing eventually became part of Chicago's Swift and Company in stages between 1915 and the mid-1930s, with Swift continuing the old Squire operation into the 1960s.

*Return to Medford Street and turn left onto South Street, passing by the wood frame, Italianate end gable house at 26 South Street built circa 1870. Turn right onto Horace Street.*



Horace Street is one of the few streets in the Boynton Yards area that still has a relatively intact cluster of industrial buildings. The two-story brick utilitarian building at **33-39 South Street and the corner of Horace Street**, dates to the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it housed a paper box factory called the Box Craft Company. By circa 1940 it contained the feather processing part of the James F. Morse Company, who was a “manufacturer of poultry foods.” The main part of the Morse Company was housed within the former Norton Tallow Company building, built in 1903.

From the 1970s until 2014, **33-39 South Street** was home to the **Golden Cannoli Company**. The company’s story begins in the mid-1960s when cousins Francesco Bono and Angelo Bresciani came to the United States from Argentina with a plan to learn English, start a business, and live ‘the American Dream.’ In 1970, after working at various bakeries in Boston’s North End, they secured a storefront and started their first bakery in Arlington, specializing in coffees and pastries. Their first bakery was such a success that they soon opened a second. While in their two small storefront bakeries, Messrs. Bono and Bresciani began making cannoli shells and fillings to supply their stores. These shells became wildly popular, and the cousins began producing larger quantities to accommodate both their stores and other local businesses. They named the business the Golden Cannoli that was started in a vacant building at 33-39 South Street. Purchase orders were placed on an antiquated fax machine, numbers were run with an old-school calculator, and when the orders came in, the cannoli were made with artisan hands, just as they are to this day. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the customer base for the Golden Cannoli’s was national in scope, and in 2012, Golden Cannoli was honored with a “Small Business of the Year Award”! In 2014, the company’s workforce had grown to 41 and they decided to move the whole enterprise to Chelsea, MA where it is currently headquartered.

Next door to the former cannoli building is the **Mystic Valley Foundry**. Incorporated in 1936 it has been housed in the long, rectangular one-story concrete building at **16 Horace Street** since 1940. Mystic Valley Foundry continues to provide its customers with high quality aluminum and brass/bronze castings.



The company's website notes that "we have the ability to handle large volume, high quality work from plans to finished product, yet we fully appreciate that all jobs start small." Over time, the Foundry has served high volume aerospace companies, low volume boat builders, and even the U.S. Navy by supplying copper replacement parts for USS Constitution's 'Old Ironsides' in Charlestown. In addition, MVF makes castings and plaques for historic sites. The company's owners, Arthur Anthony Sr. and Arthur Anthony Jr., provided the castings and finished sculpture for the Arrow Paper Fire Memorial which will be seen shortly on South Street. The Foundry is reportedly the last enterprise of its type in the Boston area.

On the east side of Horace Street, at the corner of Ward Street, is the former **George W. Norton Soap Works**. This industrial complex at **11 Horace Street** consists of three structures. The main or central building (1903) is a three-story, square, flat-roof, red brick structure with segmental arch windows with granite keystones, sills and belt courses. The keystones, belt courses and corbelling represent an unusual attempt to move beyond a utilitarian sensibility into a late Victorian style. The Norton Street façade culminates in a corbelled cornice. The second structure is a three story, post-1925 metal-clad building contiguous with the south wall of the main building. Then a two-story northern component was added in 1989. The George W. Norton Soap Company was founded as early as 1820 by Henry Norton. In 1887, George W. Norton became sole proprietor and the business was moved to South Street in the early 1900s. Shortly after this move, it was described as "one of the most modern and best equipped soap and rendering plants in New England." Adjoining the three-story factory were stables, an engine room, and storage sheds. The company manufactured laundry soap and a specialty, "Norton's Tidy Soap," reputed to be "one of the purest and best laundry soaps made." The company was in business until at least the late 1920s, when it was called the Norton Tallow Company. The rendering of tallow and the production of soap was a natural offshoot of the enormous meat packing industry that evolved in Somerville.

On the east side of the 1903 building at **15 Ward Street** is the **Somerville Brewery**, also known as **Slumbrew**. The brewery was originally started outside Somerville, by a husband-and-wife team in 2011. It has since expanded distribution into six states, achieved production of over 2,000 barrels of beer annually, and grown from 2 employees to over 35, all of whom are now working in Somerville. Two retail-café destinations have recently been added, at South Street and Assembly Row, where its core brand of Slumbrew beer and other innovative food can be enjoyed. The cafes appear to be indicative of the exciting growth the company is experiencing, as well as the birth of a new industry in Somerville.

*Look north down Horace Street to see modest dwellings bordering both sides of this dead end way. At the end is a structure that serves as a sound barrier against the noise generated by passing MBTA commuter trains and which some locals refer to as the 'Berlin Wall'.*



During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Horace Street was home to Irish and Italian families employed as pipe fitters, laborers, slaughter house workers, rubber factory workers, and the like. Photographer Lewis Hines (1874-1940) is known to have taken photos here of children who grew up in the midst of unpaved, trash-strewn streets and were subjected to the noxious odors of the meatpacking factories. Hines exposed the practice of employing elementary school-aged children, as seen in a photograph of a poorly illuminated, minimally furnished house at 22 Horace Street where children toiled as crochet apparel workers.

*Head west on Ward Street, turn left onto Harding Street (originally Emery Street) and then return to South Street, going westward to see the twin cupolas of Roosevelt Towers, a 1950s low-income residential development.*

South Street is lined on the north by the evolving commercial area known as Boynton Yards, which was once the site of animal slaughtering and food processing. The south side of the street is a mix of community gardens and scrap metal junkyards. Before the street pattern was altered in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, South Street terminated on the east side of Boynton Yards.

### **South Street Gardens.**

This green space on the south side of South Street is a welcome contrast to the black asphalt-paved parking lots and drab gray concrete buildings of this gritty urban area. The project was inspired and brought to life by **Groundwork Somerville**, a local non-profit that strives to bring about the sustained regeneration, improvement and management of the physical environment. This is achieved through the development of community-based partnerships which empower people, businesses and organizations to promote environmental, economic and social well-being. Groundwork's "Green Team" is the organization's environmental youth employment program. Its members work throughout the City building gardens, cleaning up rivers, and engaging the community in projects that foster positive environmental change. An overriding goal for the Green Team is to develop leadership and skills among low-income and underserved youth, expose them to green job opportunities and environmental careers, and work for the improvement of the physical environment, food access, and health equity. Past projects have ranged from advocating for youth jobs and transportation equity at the State level, to designing and building Somerville's first Urban Farm, which grows food for their affordable Mobile Farmers Markets.

*Now look across the street to appreciate the Arrow Paper Fire Memorial.*

Dedicated on June 6, 1999, the **Arrow Paper Fire Memorial** honors firefighters Joseph Reilly and Robert Brickley, both members of Engine Company Two who died in the line of duty on June 10, 1974.



They fought valiantly to extinguish a fierce fire that destroyed a storage facility full of flammable materials. They perished when the north wall of the Arrow Paper Company collapsed on them. Their Memorial is 400 yards northwest of this site. The centerpiece is a cast bronze sculpture depicting a coiled fire hose with a nozzle and coupling. Two fire axes cross beneath a loop of the hose, one for each of the fallen men.

Designed by Scott Vaughn, the casting and finished sculpture was created by Arthur Anthony Sr. and Arthur Anthony Jr. of Mystic Valley Foundry. The hose, axes and nozzle were cast from authentic equipment

from the Somerville Fire Department. A small park surrounds the memorial with four granite benches arranged in a semi-circle around the sculpture. The garden, designed by Michael Weinmayer, and composed of Weeping Cherry, Black Pine and Burning Bush, defines the Memorial, and creates a public space of beauty, inviting relaxation and contemplation.

*Turn right onto Windsor Street, and walk up to the intersection of Windsor Street and Windsor Place. Stop at the west entrance to Boynton Yards, and then head west onto Windsor Place.*

**Boynton Yards** is a largely industrial area located southeast of Union Square between the Fitchburg Railroad tracks and the Somerville/Cambridge border. Much of it was originally part of the Miller's River, and by 1874 the central part was occupied by Boynton Yards Meatpacking. According to the Somerville Atlas, meatpacker Charles H. North took ownership of this large tract by 1884, and the 1874 Atlas appears to show little change to the configuration of buildings, indicating that the central Boynton building was constructed of brick, while a dozen or more surrounding structures and sheds were of wood construction. The company had a spur that linked them with the Fitchburg Railroad.

In the early 1980s, the City approved an Urban Revitalization Plan for Boynton Yards that has resulted in the demolition of several buildings, cleanup of industrial waste, construction of three light-industry buildings, and extension of South Street to support truck traffic. In 1989, the **Gentle Giant** moving company relocated from Boston to a warehouse on Harding Street. Its operations and number of employees have grown immensely and it now has offices in seven cities across the U.S.

In 2012, Somerville adopted an updated vision for the Boynton Yards Urban Revitalization Plan that foresaw a transit-oriented mixed-use district. As is true throughout this tour and most prior ones, Boynton Yards is a neighborhood in transition, due in part to its strategic location near the future Green Line station for Union Square.

*On the south side of Windsor Place is a large business block known as 561 Windsor Place.*

**561 Windsor Place** lies within the larger Boynton Yards district, which draws its name from one of its major industries, meatpacking, in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1957, 561 Windsor Street housed the Consolidated Bag and Foil Corporation and Sugarman Brothers, with the Bushway Ice Cream Factory nearby in 1951. Today, the building is leased by a mix of commercial and industrial uses and retains some of its manufacturing flavor in the form of the Taza Chocolate Factory. Called by Union Square Main Streets as “Somerville’s quietly awesome business incubator,” this utilitarian brick building at #561 contains a vibrant mix of innovative, creative economy and food-based businesses that employ dozens of people. The design community is well represented here with architectural, woodworking and photography studios, while other creative economy businesses include advertisers, music recording studios, screen printers, embroiderers and restorers of art and furniture.



*Take a look across the street to view the vegetable garden in front of 600 Windsor Place sponsored by Green City Growers (GCG).*

**Green City Growers** is a non-profit organization that specializes in vegetable garden installation, maintenance, and education for homes and businesses. They help homeowners plan, set up, and install 4x4 or 4x8 garden beds. For businesses they do everything from rooftop gardens to outdoor beds of any size. GCG offers weekly and/or monthly garden maintenance by one of their traveling gardeners. For people who want to do it all themselves, they’ll install the bed and provide a “self-farming course.” GCG representatives can de-mystify things like cool drip irrigation systems, solar power pumps, wireless moisture sensing gear, and the like.





*Heading west from the garden at 600 Windsor Place, follow Windsor onto Columbia Street, and continue onward to Webster Avenue. At the southwestern corner is the former James P. O'Neill Coal Company garage.*

The historic name of the one-story concrete structure at **62 Webster Avenue** is the **J. P. O'Neill Coal Company**. The O'Neill name is still faintly visible within a panel at the center of its stepped parapet. The building was used as a truck garage for the delivery of coal products, but is not listed in directories between 1924 and 1933. The main portion of the company was located on the north side of Columbia Street and consisted of several no longer extant coal pockets and a small office.

*Heading north on Webster Avenue, pass by the former site of the Union Glass Works.*

Probably the largest and most significant of Somerville industries that came to the fore during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was the **Union Glass Works**. The factory was located at 52 Webster Street and quickly grew into an extensive operation. Union Glass Works was founded in 1854 by businessmen Amory and Francis Houghton. The company made glass lighting fixtures through the mid-1920s. Although no structures remain for Union Glass, the company complex is well-documented, in part because of the Houghton's involvement in the founding of Corning Glass in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which is seen as an offshoot of East Cambridge and Somerville Glass Companies. When Amory Houghton organized his new company, he wished to make it clear that he supported the anti-slavery movement; hence the name Union Glass Company. It is possible that Amory's choice of company name resulted in the renaming of the commercial district to the north, which became known as Union Square, rather than Sand Pit Square. During the early days of the company, Amory delegated many daily administrative responsibilities and the presidency of the new company to his younger brother Francis, a minor stockholder, who years earlier had been brought into his brother's wharf business.



Jeffrey J. Mathews of the School of Business and Public Administration at the University of Puget Sound stated in the *Yankee Enterprise* that: "... the Somerville plant's design, construction, and size were fairly typical of new glass houses built in the antebellum period, and flint (lead) glass works like Houghton's were, by then, becoming nearly as prominent as window and bottle factories, which had previously dominated the U.S. industry. With several buildings for mixing, melting, blowing, grinding, and storage, the plant adjoined a wide street (Webster Street) with immediate access to rail transportation. The factory employed two nine-pot furnaces, whose parallel chimneys reached more than a hundred feet skyward. Each clay pot, or crucible, was capable of holding over three thousand pounds of molten glass. The crown furnaces were fired directly

by coal fuel and took a natural air draft from below. Manufacturing a broad array of flint glass products such as lamps, lamp trimmings, bottles, windows, lenses, tableware, the Union Glass Company employed 100 men and acted primarily as a wholesaler competing directly against many northeastern firms, including Cambridge's New England Glass Company and Bay State Glass."

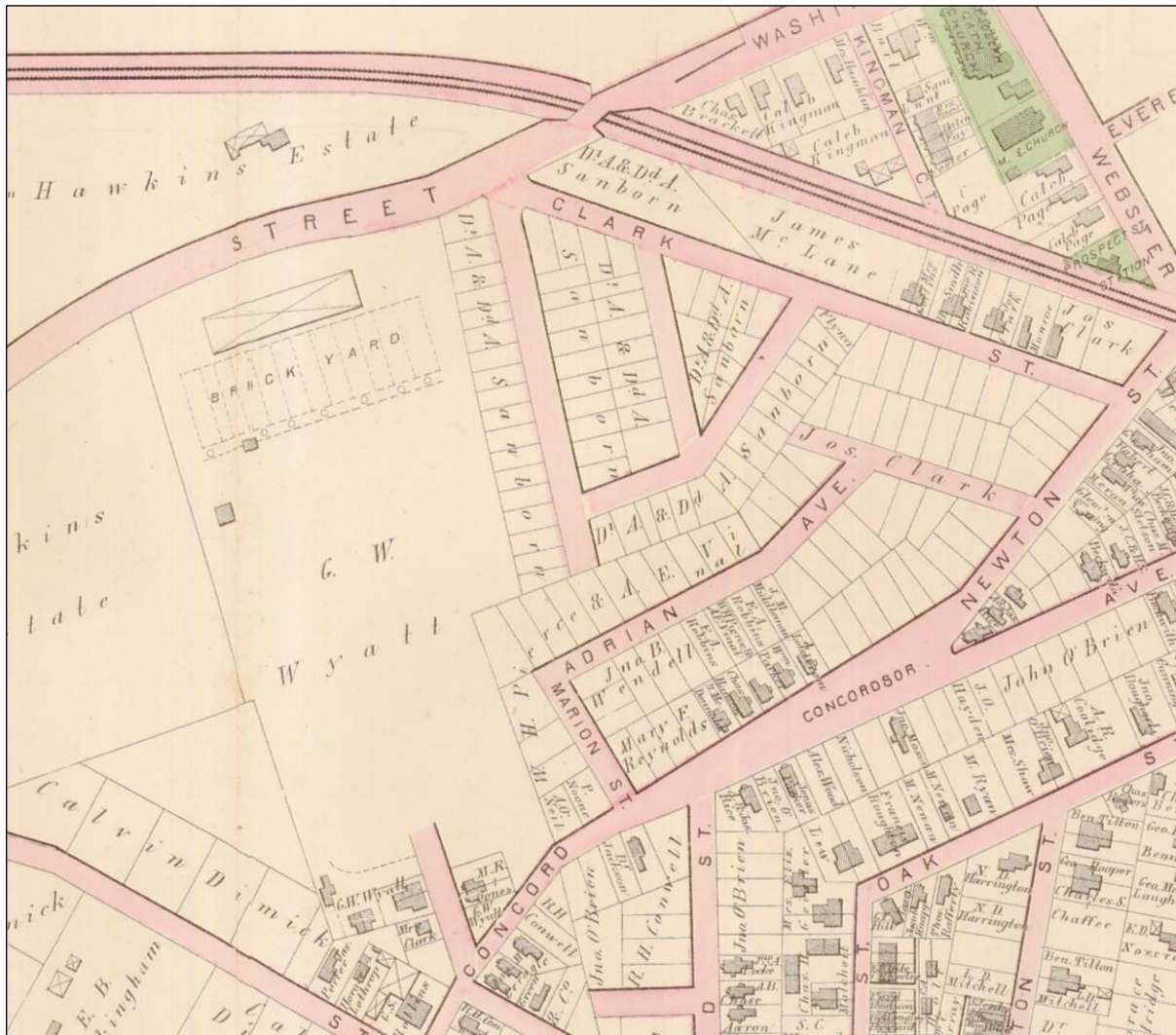
By the end of the 19th century the company employed roughly 200 workers, many of whom were immigrants from Italy, Sweden, England and elsewhere. Union Glass produced a wide range of glass products, adapting to shifting fashions and economic conditions. Initially, Union Glass manufactured doorknobs, lamps and lamp trimmings, bottles, windows, lenses, and tableware. Railroad lanterns were also a significant source of revenue, as railroad workers would use lantern hand-signals to communicate with the engineer. One of the most famous objects created by Union Glass was a giant 150-pound punch bowl commissioned by Tiffany and Co. A team of 15 men spent 110 days meticulously cutting it. It was displayed in the Tiffany's showroom in New York with a price tag of \$3,000, which adjusted for inflation would represent about \$77,000 in today's dollars. During the late 19th century Union Glass won acclaim for its high quality art glass products. Production of art glass peaked during the ownership of the company by Julian deCordova, a merchant and investor of Jamaican heritage. Under his leadership the company survived the tumultuous 1880s and stayed in Somerville while most glass making companies were moving west for cheaper fuel and resources.



*Head north on Webster Avenue and notice the commercial garage.*

Constructed in 1924 for Michael J. Canney, this utilitarian structure *at 45 Webster Avenue* housed a business that sold and traded used cars and trucks, as well as automotive parts and accessories. **Canney's Garage** is one of numerous early Automobile Age structures that survive from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Somerville. In 1925 Canney was the only used truck dealer listed in the City directories. Until circa 1960 the building was used for truck repair. Note the garage's parapet which bears the date of "1924" in its center.

*Cross Webster's intersection with Prospect and pause to look at the former site of the Union Square station on the Fitchburg Line. Some of the stairs that led to the station are still visible. Now head southwest on Newton Street and look across the street at relatively unaltered workers' housing that borders the south side of the Newtown Court cul-de-sac. We will turn right onto **Clark Street**.*



Clark, Newton and other streets in the area were set out during the 1860s on part of the Joseph Clark Estate. The 1852 Draper Map of Somerville indicates that Clark Street was initially a driveway leading from Newtown Street to what is probably the Greek Revival, circa 1840s, end gable residence at 11 Clark Street. Although Joseph Clark owned 11 Clark Street during the 1870s, his residence is listed as Elm Place in Somerville. The northeast side of Clark Street developed with houses around 1860, while the southwest side's houses were built after 1880. Of particular interest in terms of historic design is the trio of T-shaped houses numbered 17-19, 23-25 and 29-31 Clark Street. These side gable double houses exhibit Italianate elements, characterized by paired entrances flanked by multi-pane side lights and surmounted by rectangular transoms. By 1920, Clark Street residents were representative of a solid middle class. Residents included a tailor, provisions dealer, superintendent, teamster, builder, cobbler, salesman, railroad car inspector, meat cutter, fireman, glass blower, mason, and several clerks.

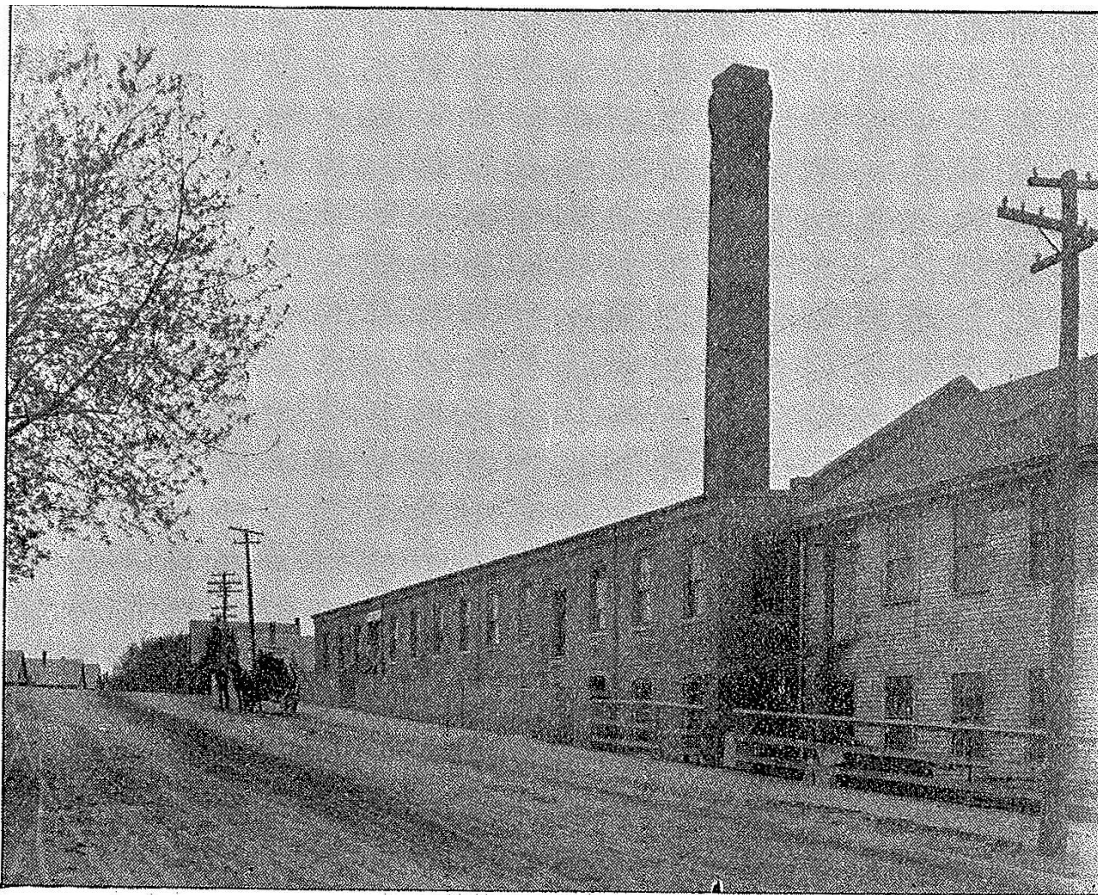
*At the foot of Clark Street walk across the site of the former **George Wyatt Brickyards**, now **Lincoln Park**, passing by the **Albert F. Argenziano School**, a kindergarten - 8th grade facility, built in 2007 to replace the Lincoln Park Community School. Turn right onto Washington Street and continue east, pausing to stop at the last two industrial sites on the tour. One of Somerville's oldest recreation areas, Lincoln Park was planned as early as 1896. The park's lawns and walks were in place by 1900, although the small pond at its southwest corner was filled in during the transition from brickyard to public green space.*



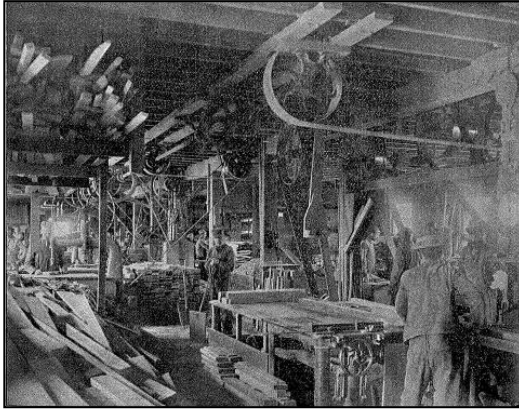
Lincoln Park occupies the site of George Wyatt's Brickyards which were called "Wyatt's Pitts" by local residents. George Wyatt lived nearby at 33 Beacon Street. The brick industry was a major component of Somerville's economy from 1820 to 1880. Somerville's soil was well-suited for brick-making. This commercial pursuit was primarily conducted in parts of the City bordering waterways, such as the Miller's River (now completely filled in) in eastern Somerville, and especially along the Mystic River. Tufts brickyards once dominated the landscape west of Cedar Street. Wyatt's Brickyards between Washington Street and Clark Street grew rapidly between 1850 and 1870. In 1850 Wyatt's business had \$2,000 in capital; by 1870 that figure had grown to \$20,000. In 1850 he had a workforce of seven and by 1870 he had thirty men in his employ. Particularly impressive is the fact that the yearly number of bricks made at his yard rose from 850 in 1850 to 2.5 million by 1870. Wyatt continued manufacturing bricks into the 1880s.

Somerville's brick industry came to an end because the land was valued more highly for house construction. The last brickyards shut down during the late 1890s when the William A. Sanborn family closed their concern, which had been open since 1849. According to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Somerville atlases the Wyatt brickyards consisted of a long rectangular structure bordering the Washington Street edge of the property, and a line of contiguous chimneys and kilns just to the south of the shed. Clay pits took up the remaining land that extended south to Lincoln Parkway.

*At the foot of Clark Street, walk in front of the Argenziano School and then turn right onto Washington Street. At the corner of Washington and Hawkins Streets is the former I.H. Brown Company.*



**I. H. BROWN & COMPANY'S MILL, WASHINGTON STREET.**



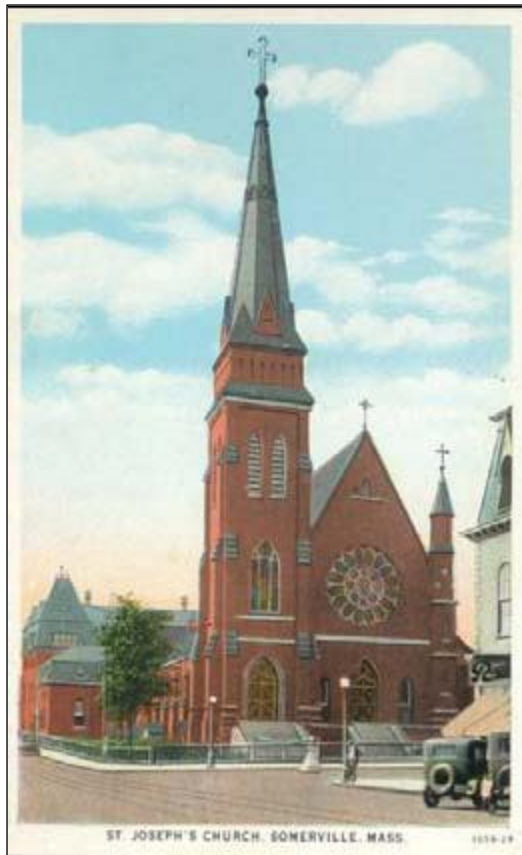
**285 Washington Street**, corner of Hawkins Street, originally housed the **I.H. Brown Moulding Company**. The building dates to the late 1880s and is typical of the carpentry and woodworking concerns that rose to the fore during the boom years of Cambridge and Somerville's expansion. The Brown Co. moved here in 1886 after a fire destroyed their headquarters in Cambridge. The company specialized in mouldings of all types, plus

window frames, sashes, drawer cases, and the like. One of the company's specialties was wooden exhibition cases for museums, including Harvard University's Agassiz Museum of Natural History. By 1928, its first floor was used for sawing and planing, the second floor for cabinet work, and the basement for planing and storage. The building currently houses Burma Designs, the Fringe Artist Design Cooperative, and Moroccan Caravan, while Metro Pedal Power rents space in the basement.

*Continuing east on Washington Street, turn right onto Kingman Road to see the last industrial site on this tour.*

**Samuel Hamblin and Caleb Kingman's wooden pump factory** was originally located on the northeast side of the Fitchburg Railroad tracks, and the southwest side of Kingman Road. It was founded in 1845, three years after Somerville's incorporation as a town, and a decade after the introduction of the Fitchburg freight line. Kingman and Hamblin made wooden pumps "of the very best white oak and pine timber," which were used in the distilleries and tanneries of Charlestown, as well as in the brickyards of Somerville, Cambridge and Medford. Judging by the 1874 and 1885 Atlases of Somerville, Kingman was the sole partner in this wooden pump company as only Kingman is listed as the owner of the four structures located across the street from the wooden mansard row on Kingman Court. By 1895, the Hopkins and Fullerton Company owned Kingman and Hopkins' structures.

*Conclude the tour at St. Joseph's R.C. Church, the spiritual home of many workers in the Union Square area.*



**St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church**, at **Washington and Webster Streets** opened circa 1870-1874. Before then, Somerville's notable population of two thousand Catholics was forced to walk considerable distances to worship in churches in Charlestown and Cambridge. On January 20, 1870, the Mayo estate was purchased, and architect James Murphy designed a new church for local Catholics. The church is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival Style favored for churches at the time. Note the lancet (pointed) arches -- a hallmark of the Gothic and Gothic Revival Style used for doorways and windows; the Gothic buttress elements along the walls and tower; and the Gothic rose/wheel window in the front gable of the church. The building is constructed in a traditional cathedral form. It boasts a high central nave illuminated by windows lining the upper portion of the roof below its ridge (clerestory) and flanking side aisles illuminated by the paired arched windows. This form originated in ancient Roman Basilicas, or court buildings, and early Christians adopted it as their own, usually with the addition of towers, steeples and other modifications, as Christianity became an accepted religion in the Roman Empire.

Over time many of the Irish, Italian and Portuguese immigrants who worked in area factories worshipped in this church. In 1871 the pastor Monsignor Christopher C. McGrath held the first services in the lower church. He then presided over the congregation for the next sixty-three years! He and a Cambridge priest are the namesakes for the McGrath and O'Brien Highway (originally the Northern Artery), which is quite possibly the only traffic artery in the U.S. named after priests! Sadly, the steeple of the church was taken down in 1978 for fear of structural instability.

Thank you for participating in this tour! Since this area that is very much in transition, expect more changes to come, bringing Somerville into a new age, with multi-faceted development, yet still respectful and appreciative of its architectural and creative manufacturing heritage.

*This brochure was produced by the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission, in concert with Edward Gordon, historical researcher and tour leader, as part of the 2016 ArtsUnion Grant Program. The program is designed to boost the cultural economic development of Union Square, Somerville. Managed by the Somerville Arts Council, ArtsUnion works in collaboration with numerous local organizations, artists, businesses, and community members to spark community-wide excitement about the Square, and create new economic opportunities for local artists. ArtsUnion is funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and its John and Abigail Adams Art Program.*

*Established in 1985, the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) 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 [www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation](http://www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation) or 617-625-6600, extension 2500.*