

Until the early 19th century, the South End that we know today was a sort of no-man's land between the main part of Boston on the Shawmut Peninsula and the town of Roxbury on the mainland. The term "South End" referred to the southern part of town. And the southernmost portion of Boston before the early to mid-19th century was today's Financial District. As we will see, as the city's geographic boundaries changed, so did the idea of what area made up the South End.

When did the South End of today appear? First, we need to understand a bit about Boston's made land. The Shawmut Peninsula ("original" Boston) was connected to the mainland and Roxbury by a long isthmus, the Neck, along which ran a main road, today's Washington Street. The map depicts the original outline of Boston. The narrowest part of the Neck, is where Washington and East Berkeley Streets intersect today.

In 1801, the town selectmen, including Charles Bulfinch, presented a plan to develop some of the necklands between the main part of Boston and Roxbury. The newly laid out area was meant to attract freestanding construction and houses surrounded by gardens and grounds. However, few people purchased these lots. One reason the Neck Lands were slow to develop was that for many years there was only one road - Washington Street - connecting them with the main part of the city.

By the late 1820s, the city of Boston reevaluated the development of the Neck. They planned more streets and divided the blocks into smaller parcels, hoping to attract a wider demographic with smaller and less expensive lot prices. By the 1840s, as foreign immigration to Boston increased, the population of the city grew dramatically and tenement housing began to dominate. The city worried that its middle and upper-middle class residents would leave for the suburbs. In the 1840s, they decided to turn the necklands into a rowhouse district to entice these families to stay within the city limits.

engineers Ellis S. Chesbrough and William P. Parrot laid out Union Park, originally called Weston Street, in its present form in 1851. It is an English style residential square surrounding a 16,000-square foot park. The park itself, which was planted with two rows of elm trees, was designed as one of the oases in the South End street plan, whereby the city could "improve the public lands" and stimulate the sale of building lots in this part of town. Lots were auctioned off within the year, and two matching cast iron fountains were installed in the park, which was enclosed by a fence in the same lotus design used on Louisberg Square. Number 45 Union Park, which was completed in 1851, was the first house on the block. Other houses were built from then through 1859.

Several prominent Bostonians lived on Union Park. A number 34 lived Alexander H. Rice, Mayor of Boston from 1856-57 (when he helped establish Boston City Hospital), U.S. Representative throughout the Civil War period, and still living here when he was three times elected Governor of Massachusetts (1876, 1877, and 1878). S. S. Pierce, the prestigious grocer, lived at number 5, while William H. Baldwin, founder and president of the Young Men's Christian Union was at number 10.

With the financial troubles of the 1870s, fashion shifted rapidly away from the South End. As banks made many foreclosures, new purchasers of the buildings began to turn more and more private homes into money-producing lodging houses. Through 1872 there were only private homes on the park, but by 1896 forty-seven of fifty-three had

become lodging houses. Property values fell by 40%, and residents such as Governor Rice moved to Beacon Street. Subsequent years saw the movement of several different immigrant groups into the area, notably those from the eastern Mediterranean countries. For many years, the South End House operated a settlement house at number 20 Union Park, headed by Robert A. Woods, editor of *The City Wilderness* (1898). The park itself, along with its cast iron fence, was restored in the 1980s.

Eight Streets was one of the first sections of the South End to be filled in. In an 1836 map, it shows that the burial ground exists, as do Franklin and Blackstone Square, although interestingly, Franklin Square was then known as Shawmut Square. Shawmut Avenue at the time was known as Suffolk Street and you can see the layout of Waltham and Hanson, Milford and Dwight. At the time, Milford Street was Lowell Street and Dwight was Groton Street.

Arab immigrants from the Eastern Mediterranean—mainly those from what is now Syria and Lebanon—began settling in the Boston area in the 1880s. Overwhelmingly Christian, these Arab newcomers left an ailing silk industry and a declining agricultural sector as well as a growing burden of taxation and conscription under the Ottoman Empire. Many of them came from the mountainous areas of northern Lebanon (then called Mount Lebanon).

Initially, men made up the bulk of the migrant population, with many returning to their homeland after a few years. By the early twentieth century, however, women and children had joined the migrant stream, and many Syrian families settled permanently in Massachusetts. Younger women and widows, in fact, were sometimes the first to migrate in their families and helped bring other relatives over. At the time, Boston had the second largest Syrian community in the United States after New York.

Prior to World War I, most Syrian immigrants clustered in the South Cove neighborhood that would become known as Little Syria or Syriantown and later Chinatown. The earliest arrivals in the 1880s and 1890s settled alongside Chinese immigrants on Oliver Place (now Ping On Alley) and Oxford and Edinboro Streets. As more newcomers arrived, they spread southward, replacing older native-born and Irish residents along Tyler and Hudson Streets and Harrison Avenue. Anchored by three Christian churches, the area south of Kneeland Street became the center of Syrian settlement with numerous churches, bakeries and coffee houses serving as communal centers.

As late as 1920, nearly three quarters of Boston's Syrian immigrants still lived in Syriantown. But in the interwar period, Syrian settlement spread across the South End, centering along Shawmut Avenue. Muslim immigrants, by contrast, were concentrated in Quincy in a much smaller community near the shipyards in Quincy Point. After World War II, many Syrian and Lebanese families bought homes in West Roxbury and Roslindale, and their Christian churches followed. The Arab students who arrived after 1965 tended to live near universities in Boston and Cambridge; those who stayed after graduating joined a growing community of Arab professionals who settled across the western suburbs.

Today, one of the last remaining landmarks of the South End's vibrant Syrian-Lebanese community is the former Sahara-Syrian restaurant and the Syrian grocer.

The area that is now Watson Park once contained row houses. Fires in the 1960s destroyed the homes and they were never rebuilt. The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) took possession of the site in the 1970s and created the open space park.

The BRA and the Eight Streets Neighborhood Association worked together to landscape Watson Park. In May 1977, the BRA and Eight Streets Neighborhood Association were awarded the Mass Horticultural Society's 1st Urban Landscape award.

Watson Park is named after Jules Watson, a long-time resident of Taylor Street.

From 2014-2016, the deeds of all fire parcels were transferred to the Boston Parks Department, ensuring the areas will remain an open public space.

Ringgold Park is on the site of the former Franklin School.

Franklin School on Ringgold Street was built in 1859. It was a 4-story brick building and contained 14 rooms and a hall. An addition was built in 1875.

This was not the original Franklin School. The Franklin School was established in 1785 from the South Writing School and the Nassau-Street School. In 1818 it was named the Franklin School in honor of Benjamin Franklin and was the first school to be named after an individual.

In 1826 a new facility was built at 1151 Washington Street (near Dover/near E. Berkeley). It was damaged by fire in 1833 and was destroyed in 1844. A new building was erected on that site, but by 1859 it was referred to as the Old Franklin School as another school was built on Ringgold Street in 1859.

On July 19, 1960, the Franklin School burned down. The area soon became a dust bowl when it was dry, a mud hole when it rained and a catch-all for everything from broken glass to abandoned cars. It was not a safe place to play. In 1962, residents became contacting the City of Boston to have a park built on the site. In 1963 the residents decided to build their own park based on plans they worked out with Dave Farley, an architect with the BRA.

Ringgold Park was known as the Eight Streets Park in the late 1960s. It was dedicated on May 25, 1968 after many years of planning. It began in 1957 when the neighborhood began petitioning the city for a lot. After the Franklin School burned down in July 1960, neighborhood efforts were renewed. In 2011-2014, Eight Streets Park is renovated and officially becomes Ringgold Park.

In the mid-1990s South End residents initiated a major renovation of the park, installing safer playground equipment, reducing the size of the basketball court, and making it more accessible to pedestrians. Neighbors later banded together to form the non-profit group Friends of Ringgold Park (FORP). In 2011, as the result of almost a decade of advocacy, community outreach and fundraising, the city of Boston rebuilt the park's central circle to incorporate an interactive yet decorative foundation. It was rebuilt in a Victorian style to honor the neighborhood's history and the 19th century building that once stood there. The city also added granite benches, inscribed pavers, low-hoop fencing and irrigated beds of flowering plants. Two years later, the two children's play areas were refreshed with more modern structures and features. Today, FORP works to keep the park a safe, attractive and enjoyable space for South End residents to gather. Ringgold hosts numerous events throughout the year,

including spring clean-ups, summer music performances and an annual Halloween party.

The park provides roughly 5 acres of multiuse activity spaces, including a baseball field, basketball courts, a children's playground, lawns and an off-leash dog run. It was built in 1974 by the BRA along with 2 other parks, Derby and Titus Sparrow, for over \$2 million.

Over the years, Peters Park has had two major renovations. The one everyone knows about was the effort install the Joe Wex Dog Park. The first was in 1982.

Although the park was created in 1974, after several run-down buildings were demolished, it was clear that the park wasn't what we know it as today. Inadequate lighting was installed that was easily vandalized and that left the park dark and unsafe for families in the South End.

By 1982, the park was filled with garbage and stolen cars that were left abandoned and the high shrubbery was a popular spot for the homeless to live. In addition, Proposition 2 ½ cut the city's Parks and Recreation Department budget by 50% in the 1st year it was passed. It was up to neighborhood groups to transform the park. In 1982, El Centro Del Cardinal, a Hispanic social service agency located 2 block from the park began to clean it up. Their project was one of 38 selected in 1982 to be partially funded with grants from the Parks Department. Teenagers volunteered to clean up the park with the Parks Department and they pulled weeds, filled hundreds of bags with garbage, replaced broken lights, sifted glass shards from the sand in the children's playground and removed an above-ground swimming pool that was never used because the plumbing was never installed.

The Berkeley Community Garden in Boston's South End is one of the largest community gardens in the city.

Dover Street was originally scheduled to be a four lane, 100 ft divided roadway from the expressway to Tremont Street and connecting on a line with Berkeley Street. Tom Deeley, deputy project director said that isn't an easy relocation problem to solve. "To clear the area quickly would mean disturbing skid row into other South End areas. It's not like the Scollay Square area, where total clearance was done and the derelicts had no choice but to leave... There is some move afoot now to drop the name Dover Street and make it part of Berkeley Street. There are two reasons for this move: to live down the bad reputation Dover Street has had for many years and because the widened thoroughfare will be a natural connection with Berkeley Street.

The citizens of Boston had stopped the urban renewal bulldozer, and started to take back their communities. In Boston and in other cities, some open lots became areas where residents started planting. Berkeley's birth began the same way. This corner of the south end (being close to Chinatown) had a large Asian population. They aggressively made their own planting areas in the location. In order to protect their plots, they often cut branches off the Olive trees along Berkeley. These are thorny branches that would serve to protect their garden spaces from theft.

As the 80's went on, Cities started to come alive again, and people started to build on all the lots that had remained open and abandoned for 10-20 years. While all cities need to grow, this put all the community gardens into jeopardy. Many community garden lots were city or private land parcels, with the gardens having no legal rights to the property.

In 1991, the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust was created, with the intention of preserving community gardens and open spaces in the South End. SELROSLT acquired the Berkeley Street parcel from the BRA, thus officially creating Berkeley Street Community Garden. SELROSLT held the land for Berkeley Gardens, as well as 17 other gardens and parks, in trust, preserving the land will be in the community's hands forever and protected from development.

Shawmut Avenue, created by the landfill on the Back Bay side of the Neck in the first quarter of the 19th century, was originally called Suffolk Street. A street railway once rumbled along this street, coming out of the tunnel at the present site of Elliot Norton Park and the Church of All Nations. Rival horsecar lines built parallel tracks running down Tremont Street, Shawmut Avenue, Washington Street and Harrison Avenue. With the advent of the larger electric trolley cars, followed by the increasing competition from the automobile, passenger traffic proved insufficient to continue the Shawmut Avenue line after about 1923.

On the left side of Shawmut Avenue, beyond Waltham Street, the Flemish Revival style of numbers 281 through 293 is quite unusual for the area. The group of houses dates from about 1852. This unique architectural style found in the South End is part of the Renaissance Revival Style. Renaissance Revival is an all-inclusive term that covers many 19th century architectural revival styles that were neither Greek nor Gothic Revival.

The Renaissance Revival of the 19th century drew inspiration from a wide range of classical Italian styles. These architects went beyond the style that originated in Florence and included styles that would be identified as Mannerist or Baroque.

A great example of the Flemish Revival Style is found at 281-291 Shawmut Avenue, at the corner of Waltham Street. These Flemish homes are easily distinguished by their roof lines of stepped Flemish gables with convex and concave curves, much like those atop the houses lining the canals of Amsterdam.

These Flemish Revival homes on Shawmut Avenue were built in 1851-2 by a brick maker, and they all have very simple flat fronts on which nearly all decoration is done with intricately patterned brickwork, rather than carved brownstone, cast iron or granite. The homes were originally covered in a stone-colored smooth stucco finish, scored with false joints to give the impression that the façade was constructed of stone blocks. Other homes in the South End were also once covered in this stone finish, but it was difficult and costly to maintain.

The smaller homes on some of these narrow connecting streets belonged to less affluent people, who could not afford to build on Chester Square or Union Park. Many were skilled artisans or small shopkeepers.

St Elizabeth's Hospital, which started in 1868 at 28 Hanson Street, moved to 78 Waltham Street in 1872. In 1885, it moved again to larger quarters at 61 West

Brookline Street, where it remained until its 20th century move to Brighton. Although Waltham seems like a quiet residential street, you may be surprised that the tracks of a horsecar line once traversed it from Tremont to Washington Street. This was discontinued in 1895, after the conversion to electric cars.

Dr. Eben Tourjee, founder of the New England Conservatory of Music, lived during the 1860s at 32 Dwight Street. At 56 Dwight Street, “Sonny” Tufts, a popular Hollywood romantic star of the 1940s, grew up and lived with his two social worker sisters. At 9 Dwight Street, you’ll find an unusual array of sculptures. This was done by the owner in the 1960s and 1970s. He was a blind artist named Phillip Ligone. Ligone passed away in 2002 and his long-time partner, Ramona Petillo (as of 2014) still lives there. Ligone was born in Boston, the only son of Italian immigrant parents. He moved to the South End in the early 1950s and in 1983 said he intended to live in the South End until he dies - which he did. He got interested in sculpture through his father, who sculpted statues for cemeteries. Most of the statues you see are from molds that Ligone purchased in Italy. In a 1983 South End News article, Ligone says that he hadn’t worked in 20 years because he had two large lottery wins that he lived off of. 1966: A \$10 million brand new “superblock” development of more than 500 units of modern middle-income housing constructed on the fringe of an historic skid-row section of the city.

Castle Square was designed by the firm of Samuel Glaser and erected in 1967 after the demolition of the closely packed group of earlier buildings on the site. An entire network of streets was eliminated for the development of the Castle Square housing. Those streets included: Hingham, Compton, Lucas and Paul Streets (all running perpendicular to Shawmut Avenue). And from the right side of Shawmut once ran Garland, Waterford, Cherry and Cobb Streets.

It borders the notorious Dover Street and Tremont Street on the fringe of the “combat zone.” The city’s renewal director, Ed Logue, needed a lot of arm twisting to get developer Bertram Druker to build badly needed housing in the rundown area. AT the time, builders were interested in light industrial development rather than housing, but Druker agreed to go along with housing.

This project is bounded by Herald, Tremont, Dover and Shawmut. On the Shawmut Ave side across the project, old derelict and run-down buildings have been demolished. Changes are coming on both sides of Tremont and Dover Streets, which border the Castle Square project, but it has been disclosed, these changes are on the low priority list. Residents will apparently have to live with Dover Street the way it is at least until 1972.

The permit for the building was filed on April 9, 1884 with estimated construction costs of \$50,000. The building opened to the public on December 22, 1884.

Cycloramas were a popular form of entertainment during the later nineteenth century. Most major cities in both Europe and North America had at least one. Built to house enormous, life size, panoramic murals, they frequently depicted battle scenes, evoking a sense of national pride while presenting graphic depictions of many historical events. The original painting for this Cyclorama depicted “The Battle of Gettysburg,” a turning point in the Civil War when the Union defeated the Confederacy and established the North’s ascendancy in the armed struggle. Never built for actual battle, the façade of the Cyclorama, with its fortress-like display of towers and battlements, was designed to instill a war-ready feeling to best provide a home for this epic battle scene.

Parisian artist Paul Dominique Philippoteaux, the leading panoramic muralist of the time, painted “The Battle of Gettysburg” in 1884. This massive canvas measured 50’ x

400' and weighed 2.9 tons. Gifted in depicting a detailed realism, Philippoteaux researched and studied his subjects before painting. For this mural he visited Gettysburg, taking numerous photographs and talking to many of the soldiers who fought in the battle.

work in the highest sense.” (The Watchman, February 19, 1885)

Based on the popularity of this Cyclorama, a second one was built just two blocks down Tremont Street at the site of what is now the Animal Rescue League. This competing venue presented a panoramic painting of “The Battle of Bunker Hill.” By 1889, interest in Philippoteaux’s “The Battle of Gettysburg” waned. A new painting was installed in the Cyclorama: “Custer’s Last Stand.” However, as popular interest in cycloramas continued to decline, these paintings were removed from the building. Between 1911 and 1913 Philippoteaux’s work traveled from New Jersey and New York to Maryland and Washington, D.C. “The Battle of Gettysburg” was stored for many years on the site of the Boston Ballet. In 1942, the United States Park Service acquired the painting and in 1962, the painting was installed in a new building at the Gettysburg National Military Park where it can be seen today.

In the mid-1890s, the venue hosted a wide variety of entertainments such horseback riding and a gun drill show. In April 1894, as part of a series of boxing events, All Star Boxing Match was the host to a bout with John L. Sullivan, the first heavyweight boxing champion and the last of the bare-fisted sluggers.

In 1923, the Cyclorama took on yet another life as home to the Boston Flower Exchange. The Exchange added the present entrance and altered the dome by adding the skylight. Second only to the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., this extraordinary dome skylight (60' high with a diameter of 127') was largest dome in the country for its time. The market operated from 6 a.m. to noon, accommodating 250 buyers and more than 100 growers. During the holiday season, these numbers more than doubled. Now located on Albany Street, the Exchange is one of the nation’s largest sellers of carnations and roses and is owned and operated by local flower growers.

In 1970, with much community support, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) designated the Cyclorama and the surrounding buildings as an arts center and named the BCA its developer.

In the 1950s, the city of Boston started to investigate the possibility of redeveloping certain neighborhoods that they believed were run down. Several potential sites were located in the South End. An urban renewal effort was going on throughout the United States and was encouraged by both the federal and local governments in many major cities.

The first area targeted for redevelopment in the South End was the neighborhood known as the New York Streets, the area between Harrison Avenue, Albany Street, Dover (now East Berkeley) Street, and Motte (now Herald) Street. People often say that the demolition of the West End in 1958 was the city’s first urban renewal project but it was actually in the South End in 1955. The Boston Housing Authority (the predecessor to the Boston Redevelopment Authority) issued a report on the condition of the New York Streets in June, 1952:

“The most cursory inspection of the New York Streets establishes it as a blighted and deteriorated neighborhood. The streets [are] inadequate for the demands of modern

traffic...The land is occupied by an indiscriminate mixture of commercial uses of every type...with slum residential properties, or housing that is well on the down grade. The neighborhood is disfigured by...openly-dumped garbage and other filth since any vestige of pride in the surroundings has long since been abandoned by the people there...The dingy houses...reveal cracked masonry, rickety entrance halls and stairways, and dirty interiors with falling plaster

....The dirty streets in the whole area swarm with children and adults too, on fair days, since the blessings of sun and light - even in the dusty gusts of air - are preferable to confinement in the squalid buildings.

Many of the businesses...are marginal in character. Some of them include the storage [and] sale...of food items, despite the fact that the neighborhood is rat infested.”

The families who lived in the New York Streets were removed and rehoused, often in places far from the South End. The city razed the area in 1955 to begin the first large scale urban renewal project in Boston (the West End followed soon after). The Boston Herald building was built shortly afterward which everyone knows today as Ink Block. There are several reasons the demolition of the New York Streets falls under the radar screen. Nobody wrote about it, at least not sympathetically. All the newspapers backed it. There were no community meetings, no protest marches. No photographer took pictures of children in front of corner candy stores; instead, the prevailing shot was of Mayor Hynes looking up at a wrecking crane poised to begin destruction. Many residents in the neighborhood were poor and working class immigrants, and therefore had no political voice.

Where does the South End Historical Society (SEHS) come in?

The SEHS formed in 1966 to preserve the South End's Victorian rowhouses and other historic architecture. In 1972, the SEHS filed an application to place the South End district on the National Register of Historic Places. They were successful. The application included about 3,000 images of South End buildings, which the SEHS retains in its collections.

In addition, in the mid-1970s, the SEHS and other South End residents filed an application with the city of Boston to make the South End a Boston Landmark District. In 1983, the city officially established the South End Landmark District and appointed a commission to oversee and enforce the district guidelines.