

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT EXPANSION REPORT

From Building Bust to Building Boom (Group E): 1874-1890

During the period of 1874 to 1890, Somerville fully recovered from the economic crisis known as the Panic of 1873. Housing starts began to experience an encouraging rise by 1880. By 1885, Somerville had a population of almost 30,000, which grew over the next five years to just over 40,000. During these years, a sizeable number of the City's newcomers hailed from Ireland, Canada, and the northern New England States. Many of these new residents found work in the expanding glass, iron, furniture and food processing businesses of the community.



During the 1870s and 1880s, Somerville witnessed a continuing growth in its transportation network, and a related rise in centralized commercial districts in Union, Davis, and Gilman Squares. Passengers could now wait in comfort and style to board Boston and Maine railroad trains due to the construction of three new passenger stations in Somerville between 1885 and 1895. The Winter Hill Station at

Gilman Square (see photo above) boasted an ornate interior, complete with a massive marble and cherry-trimmed fireplace.

The electric trolley was first introduced to the Boston area on Beacon Street in Brookline in 1886. It arrived in Somerville shortly thereafter in 1889, and was located on Broadway, Medford Street, and the Washington Street/Milk Row (Somerville Avenue) corridor. The emergence of a trolley line was analogous to firing a shot to announce the start of a race -- in this case the race to build housing that could accommodate families who could now commute more easily from Somerville to work in Boston, as well as adjacent communities. Housing designed for the trolley-riding families tended to be of the multi-family type. This contrasted with pre-1889 when the most familiar pattern of homebuilding in Somerville was large single-family residences upon large-sized lots.

Predominant Architectural Styles

Italianate Style (1865-1890)

The Italianate style was prevalent in Somerville until as late as the mid 1880s. The style's longevity may be attributed to the 'resistance to change' attitude of many builders, who began their work in the 1840s. These master builders began their careers when the new town had a seemingly endless supply of undeveloped land and the Italianate style was just coming into vogue. Four decades later, a few Somerville builders were still wedded

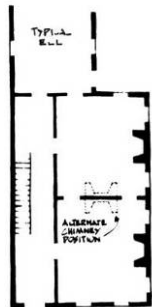


Figure 1: Side Hall Plan.

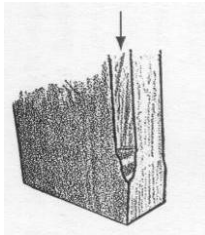


Figure 2: Detail of a chamfered post.

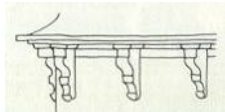


Figure 3: Bracketed eave detail.

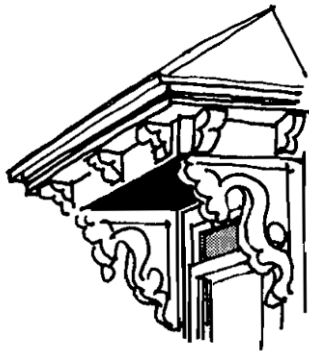


Figure 4: Bracketed door hood.

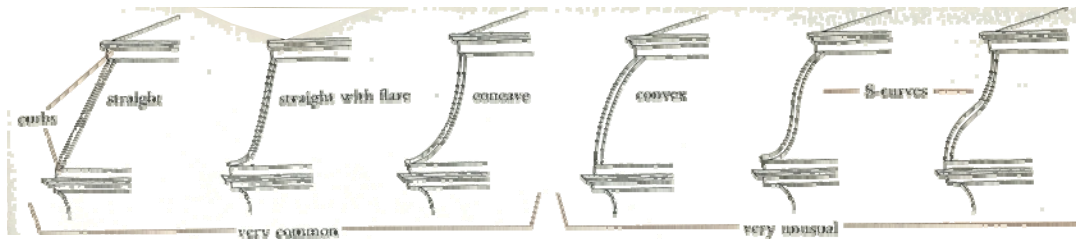


Figure 5: Mansard roof shapes.

to key elements of the style -- houses with the roof gables of the main façade facing the street and interiors with a side hall plan (Figure 1). During this period, saw cut brackets continued to be used as supports for door hoods (see Figures 2, 3, & 4 for typical Italianate elements), and also at the eaves of roofs for purely ornamental purposes.

One reason for the Italianate style's enduring popularity in Somerville was that its compact rectangular forms were easily situated on Somerville's modest-sized parcels. This can be seen very clearly in the workers' cottages in the Hinckley-Magoun neighborhood of the City.

Mansard or Second Empire Style (1860-1880)

By 1870, a more steeply pitched, straight-angled roof, known as a "mansard," was widely used for both cottage-scale dwellings, as well as more substantial houses. The design of a mansard roof allowed for interiors with higher ceilings and for more space than the cramped attic rooms typically found in pre-Civil War houses with gable roofs. (Figure 5 illustrates the variety of different roof types used during the mid- to late nineteenth century).

During this time period, the mansard became even more substantial in appearance, as a low-pitched, "hipped roof" was frequently constructed atop the straight-angled mansard. This "hip-on-mansard" roof provided even more head room, further changing the notion that the mansard was simply a glorified attic. In most areas of Boston, the Mansard Style's popularity began to decline by the mid-1870s. A major factor was the perception of city officials,



Figure 6.

Queen Anne Style

Typical Features:

- mix of sheathing types (clapboards, wood shingles, brick)
- prominent porches
- asymmetrical building form
- turned porch details
- decorative shingle patterns
- stained glass windows
- varied window sizes & shapes
- ornamental terra cotta panels
- complex roof configurations

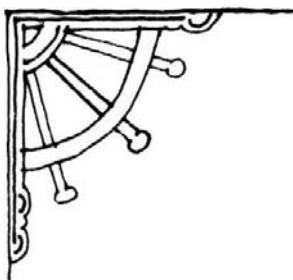


Figure 7: Queen Anne "Sunburst" bracket.

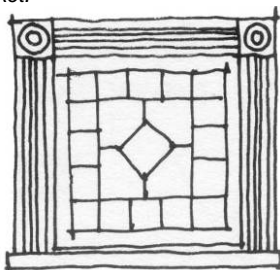


Figure 8: Typical Queen Anne multi-light window.

property owners and others that its prominent double-pitched configuration and associated flammable sheathing materials encouraged the spread of fire from one roof to the next. During the late 1860s and early 1870s several American cities, such as Chicago, Boston, and Portland, Maine suffered catastrophic fires. During the Great Boston Fire of 1872, for example, seven-hundred buildings were destroyed in Boston's downtown area over a three day period.

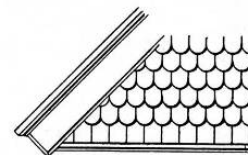
In Somerville, a few scattered row houses with mansard roofs were still being built around 1880 on Winter Hill (Adams St.), in East Somerville (Florence St.), and on the lower slopes of Prospect Hill (Summer St.). These row houses are reminiscent of the South End and other neighborhoods in Boston, where street after street was developed with rows of attached houses. In Somerville, however, these red brick row houses stand out as exceptions to the predominant housing stock, which to this day remains overwhelmingly built up with detached single- and multi-family housing of wood-frame construction.

From the period of 1874-1890, residential architecture was in a period of transition, as the older styles, such as Italianate and Mansard, were superseded by new architectural styles, known as the Queen Anne and the Stick style.

Queen Anne Style (1875-1910)

The Queen Anne style first became popular in England during the 1860s and surfaced in New England during the late 1870s, as seen in some of the mansion-scale summer "cottages" of Newport, Rhode Island and in the row houses of Boston's Back Bay. In Somerville, the rise of the Queen Anne style began during the mid 1880s as homeowners and architects grew tired of the inflexible geometric forms of the Italianate and Mansard styles. One of the most innovative features of this new style was the extensive use of porches that often wrapped around a corner of the house. These "outdoor parlors" encouraged a less formal approach to family life, at least as far as interactions on the open porch. Traditional materials were used for decorative effects on both brick and wood-framed buildings. Terra cotta, unglazed fired clay, for example, often enlivened plain masonry surfaces, such as walls and chimneys. (See Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, & 10).

Figure 9: Typical Queen Anne fish-scale gable details.



Early Queen Anne houses were

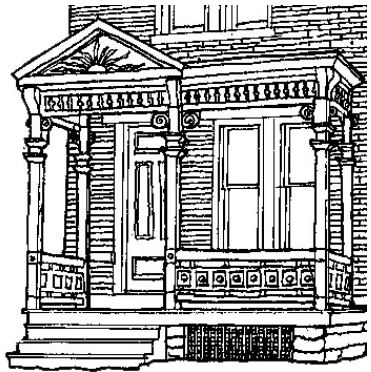


Figure 10: Typical Queen Anne porch.



Figure 12.

Stick Style

Typical Features:

- overlay of vertical and horizontal elements over clapboards
- pointed arch windows
- apron panels containing X-shaped elements
- massive trim work in gable
- small, triangular-shaped dormers
- steep pitch in gable roof
- corbelled brick chimneys



Figure 13: Trim work in gable.

constructed throughout the eastern half of Somerville, but were especially prevalent in the neighborhoods of East Somerville, Prospect Hill, and the south slope of Spring Hill

Stick Style (1865-1890)

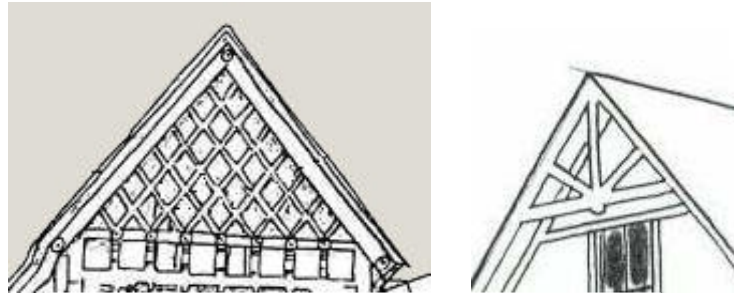


Figure 11: Typical elements found on Stick Style buildings.

Another architectural style, known as the Stick style, was also popular in America between 1865 and 1890. It is an offshoot of the Carpenter Gothic and Swiss Chalet styles that were in vogue during the 1840s and 1850s. The most readily identifiable feature of

the Stick style is a decorative framework of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal boards or "sticks" that overlay clapboards. Although the Stick style is not well represented in Somerville it was typically used in the design of several chapel-scale churches and to a lesser extent, in some house designs. (see Figures 12 & 14 for examples of a Stick Style house and church).

One of the best examples of a Stick style building in Somerville is St. James Episcopal Church in West Somerville. Built in 1876, its Stick Style features include a door hood with diagonal bracing, triangular dormers, and a gable roof that is narrow and steeply pitched.



Figure 14: Stick Style church.

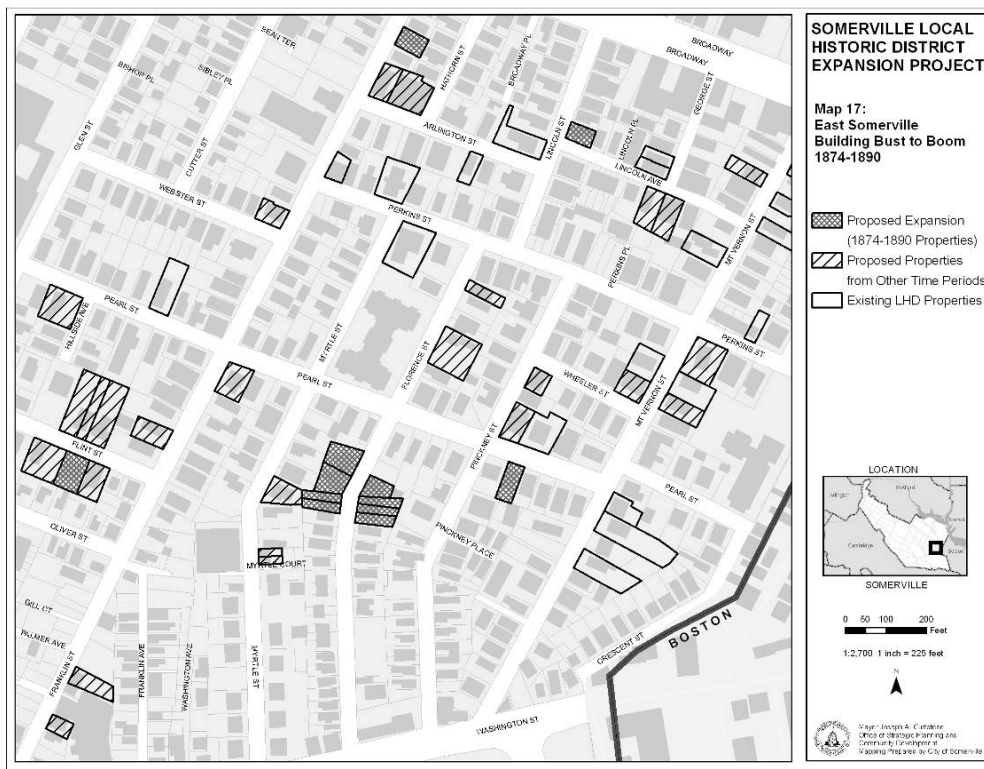
Local Historic Districts Representing Late 19th Century Somerville (Group E)

EAST SOMERVILLE

East Somerville solidified its position as a fashionable neighborhood during the 1870s and 1880s. Large Italianate, Mansard, and Queen Anne Style houses were built on still ample-sized lots bordering such streets as Flint, Florence, and above all, on Pearl Street. These houses were constructed by and for members of the local building trades, in addition to business men commuting to Boston by train. Some “captains of industry” were only a short walk from their factories which bordered Washington Street and defined the neighborhood’s gritty southern edge.

Expansion of East Somerville Local Historic District (Map 17)

A current single building historic district incorporating the very significant *1 Arlington Street* property is proposed for expansion with one additional house situated diagonally across from it. *One Arlington Street* is a center gable Italianate house with Eastlake Style features, due to a wing addition in the late 1880s. The Eastlake Style, considered a subset of the Queen Anne Style, was typically used in furniture design in the 1870s and 1880s, but it was employed at *1 Arlington Street* to enliven the exterior trim of the front porch and window surrounds, including elaborate iron cresting. The house also has great historical interest due to its original owner, Charles Williams Jr., who lived there from 1876-1909. Williams was an early protege of the inventor Alexander Graham Bell, who enabled it to be the terminus for the world’s first outdoor experimental telephone line from Boston.



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Built in 1885, **16 Lincoln Street**, at the corner of Lincoln Avenue, is proposed to expand the existing district. It represents a late example of the Mansard Style as seen in the straight-angled mansard roof with original slate roofing and shed dormers. The house retains its original Italianate porch with cut-away, or chamfered posts (see Figure 2), and has clear ties to local labor history through its first owner Albion Towle, a teamster. Later occupants included a railway dispatcher and a biscuit salesman.

WINTER HILL

At one time Winter Hill was almost exclusively the domain of the Adams, Tufts and Magoun families who owned very large farms extending from Broadway to the railroad on the southern slope of the Hill. The area did not begin to witness significant residential development until a decade or more after the Civil War. Like the houses on Prospect and Spring Hills, the quality of the design and craftsmanship was notably high as those who could afford it liked their residences to have scenic views overlooking the elevated terrain.

The development of Winter Hill was a result of the speculative real estate practices of Cutler Downer, a Boston businessman and long time resident of Central Street, as well as by numerous other individuals, who often resided beyond the boundaries of Somerville. During this period the neighborhood was home to families headed by furnace dealers, retired sea captains, bank clerks and the like. By the late 1870s, the Irish population in the area was sufficient to warrant the construction of a second Roman Catholic house of worship in Somerville, known as St. Anne's Religious Society, organized in 1877.

Winter Hill Local Historic District (Map 20)

The Mansard Style row house constructed in 1880 at **29-33 Sargent Avenue** was a forerunner of the building boom that occurred in Somerville at the turn of the twentieth century when multi-unit residences began to proliferate. These wood-framed houses are prominently sited at the bend of a dog-leg street, and are clearly visible from Broadway. Each of the four attached Brackett-Frost Row Houses were intentionally built to be subdivided into two flats. The style combines Italianate features (deep bracketed door hoods, polygonal bays, and bracketed roof cornice) with a straight-sided mansard roof. Over time, the residents came from the ranks of blue-collar workers, including a machinist, a steamfitter, a wood worker, and a radio repairman.

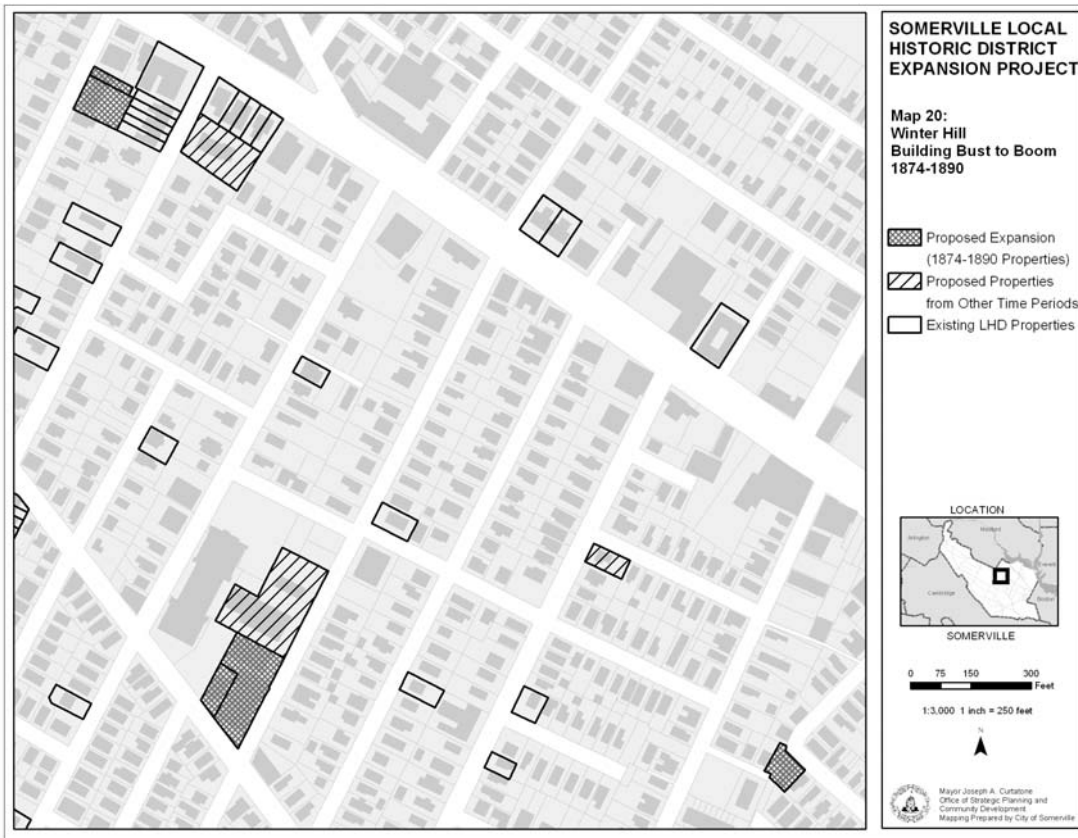
The **St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church Local Historic District** is proposed to encompass four buildings (a rectory, a church, a convent, and a school), that occupy a campus-like setting at the corner of Medford and Thurston Streets. Also nearby at 50B Thurston Street is St. Anne's Parish Hall, the foundation of which is the original church. The Hall has been too extensively altered to be worthy of historic designation. The St. Anne's complex evolved between 1881 and 1930, and only **St. Anne's Church** at **399 Medford Street** and the **Rectory** at **399A Medford Street** are proposed for designation in this group and time period, due to the convent and school buildings' later date of construction.

The **Rectory** was built in 1885 to provide housing for the priest of the church, Father John Galvin of County Clare, Ireland. He served as the church's pastor for over a quarter of a century. It is topped with a substantial cupola that remains a major landmark on Medford Street.

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The entrance bay features a Queen Anne porch with a fan motif in the roof pediment, while the front doors are adorned by Colonial Revival sidelights. Vintage post cards, however, indicate that this residence had a Stick Style overlay of vertical and horizontal boards (see Figures 11 – 14), which are perhaps now hidden under the modern siding.

The **Church** is memorably anchored at the complex’s southeast corner, at the intersection of Thurston and Medford Streets. Constructed in 1897-99 in the Romanesque Revival Style it can be seen as a high profile product of the City’s late nineteenth century building boom. The church was built to serve the spiritual needs of the hundreds of Irish, and later of the Italian families who settled on Winter Hill during the 1890s and early 1900s. Its construction was based upon designs provided by the noted ecclesiastical architectural firm of Keely and Houghton.



The summit of Winter Hill presently boasts an enclave of protected buildings that includes three Mansard Style double houses at *392-394*, *396-398* and *400 Broadway*, one red brick row at *192-200 Central Street*, and the Broadway Winter Hill Congregational Church at *404 Broadway*. It is proposed to add to this collection the mansard-roofed row at **55-63 Adams Street** of c.1880, and Temple B'nai Brith at *201 Central Street* at a later time period. These buildings trace Winter Hill’s rise as a fashionable residential quarter from the 1870s until the mid 1920s.

To a great degree, this hilltop area could be named in honor of Cutler Downer. He was a Boston real estate broker who owned a large tract that extended from Medford Street to Broadway and from Central to Adams Streets. He lived in the c.1868 Second Empire residence that is still extant at 170 Central Street. His business on State Street in Boston had one of the

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first commercial telephone lines in the nation. The property at **55-63 Adams Street** is a row of Second Empire red brick houses developed by Downer around 1880. The lot is contiguous to that of the nearly identical Mansard row houses at *192-200 Central Street*. Stylistically, the five-units exhibit typically Italianate angled full-height bays, brackets on the door hoods of the main façade, and paneled wooden cornices. By the early 1900s, residents of this row included an engineer, a salesman, a purveyor of dairy products, a leather goods dealer, and a physician.

HINCKLEY-MAGOUN

The Hinckley-Magoun area is an interesting urban village within the larger City. Although populated primarily by Irish families during this period, the neighborhood also attracted French and German immigrants. More than a few of its families were headed by teamsters who benefited from the proximity to Broadway, historically a major haul road for local produce bound for Boston. Workers of the nearby Boston and Maine Railroad as well as local industries also lived here. Houses in this compact well-defined neighborhood represent the affordable housing of their day. In 1890, the Winter Hill Land Company hired Boston contractor Jacob W. Wilbur to build modest cottage-scale residences on lots bordering Henderson, Berwick, and Wilton Streets. This contrasted sharply with many nineteenth century developers who focused their attention on creating luxury residential subdivisions for white-collar professionals. By the end of 1890, the neighborhood was almost completely built-up, primarily due to this tract development project for blue-collar wage earners.

Hinckley-Magoun Local Historic District (Map 21)

This multi-building LHD encompasses **10, 13, 21 and 23 Henderson Street**, all of which were built by the Winter Hill Land Company in 1890, as well as *22 Henderson Street*, built in 1897 and proposed for designation in a later time period. Of all the streets in the Hinckley/Magoun neighborhood, Henderson Street, set out in 1890, has perhaps the greatest antique charm. This is due to its unusually narrow width bordered by closely settled houses that are mostly of similar (and once identical) form. Stylistically, these houses represent modest examples of the Queen Anne Style, which is most evident in the barge boards covering the eaves of the side gables, and the exposed rafters under the cornice. These side gable houses follow a side hall rather than central hall plan of one and a half stories. The original residents of these houses represented a true melting pot of immigrant families of German, French and Irish descent, who worked as a Boston tailor, streetcar motorman, and carpenter, as well as laborers for the nearby industries.

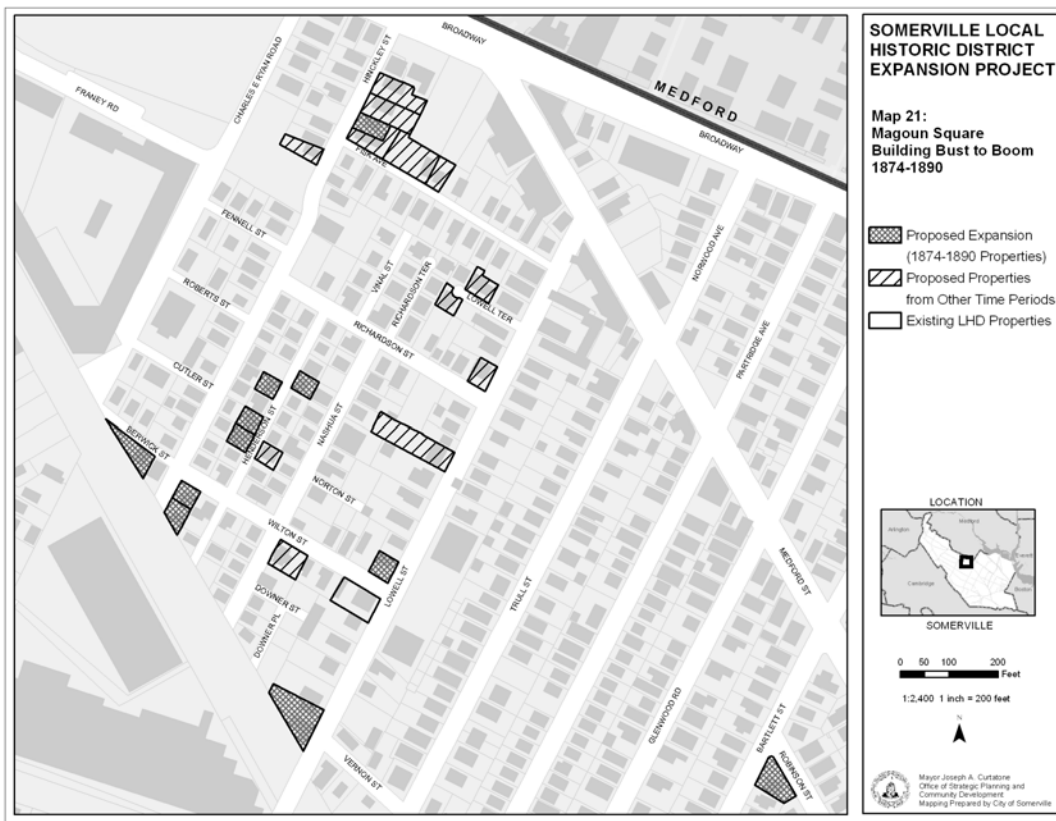
The majority of the houses in this L-shaped LHD were built during the 1860s and 1870s, including **8 and 12 Hinckley Street** and **23, 25 and 37 Fiske Avenue** proposed in Group B. The exception to this rule is the proposed **16 Hinckley Street** which was built circa 1886-1887 for Boston salesman Patrick Kane. While many of the houses in the Hinckley-Magoun area are cottage-scale of one and a half stories, this house rises to the relatively imposing height of two-and-one-half stories, indicating that by the late 1880s homeowners of more comfortable means were moving into this neighborhood of blue-collar workers. The design of the house is simple Italianate Style with minimal period details evident in the gable cornice and the box bay at the south facade. Originally, this house lot was occupied by a Late Federal/Italianate dwelling that was moved next door and re-numbered *37 Fiske Avenue*.

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The houses at **80 and 84 Hinckley Street**, together with **4 Berwick Street**, are all part of the fourth set of house lots laid out in 1890 by the Winter Hill Land Company, adjacent to the Boston and Maine Railroad. J. W. Wilbur, a Boston area developer for the Company, built them in simple Queen Anne Style, which is primarily evident in the broad barge boards on the facades of the gable. They form a small local historic district that defines the close-knit neighborhood of workers cottages. Early occupants of these wood-frame houses included a teamster, a laborer, and the captain of a yacht.

The existing LHD consists of 2 buildings on one lot, at the southwestern corner identified as *302 Lowell/6 Wilton Street*. Constructed around 1884, the six paned window on the Lowell/Wilton corner suggests it was once the display window for an old neighborhood store created at a later, undetermined date. Proposed as an addition to this LHD is **308 Lowell Street**, which is located across the street on the northwestern corner. It is a well-preserved, modest wood-frame house built around 1875 also in the Italianate Style, as seen in its bracketed door hood and the return eaves at the gable end. Both houses show how Italianate houses can take different structural forms. These Hinckley-Magoun area properties are representative of residential and commercial life in a late 19th century workers' neighborhood with the original residents being a vegetable peddler (#302) and an Irish laborer (#308).

Situated near the Lowell Street railroad bridge, **282 Lowell Street**, built in 1875, is a compact workers' cottage with a front door that covers almost the entire first story façade. The Italianate Style can be seen in the return eaves on the street gable. This house was originally owned by a succession of railroad and factory workers.



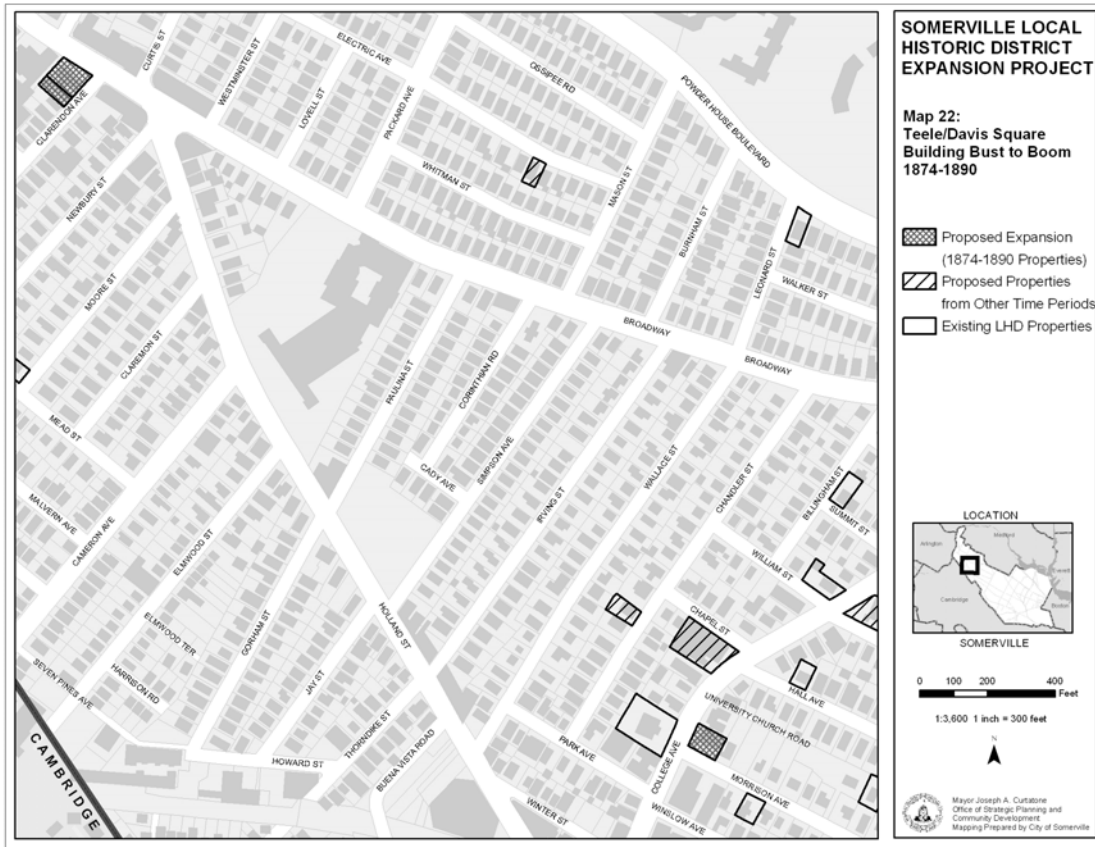
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DAVIS SQUARE

By the mid 1880s, College Avenue between Davis and Powder House Squares, was beginning to emerge as the spiritual center for West Somerville. This is evidenced by the half dozen houses of worship that border this thoroughfare. The Third Universalist Church (1884) was built during the area's transition from a rural farming area to an important commercial center and transportation hub. This transformation was directly linked to the introduction of the Boston and Maine Railroad to Davis Square in 1871.

Corridor of Faith Local Historic District (Map 22)

The Third Universalist Church at **45 College Avenue**, now housing the Haitian Baptist Church, was built in 1884 from designs provided by Hosea B. Dennison, an architect as well as member of the congregation. It was a harbinger for the numerous churches that would follow over the next half century. The church's original Stick Style features include x-shaped motifs on the panels of the double doors, pointed arch windows, and steeply pitched roof gables. Although vinyl siding currently obscures these original features, the church's open belfry is still intact with a punched and cut decoration, as well as a pyramidal roof cap. Indeed, the distinctive belfry atop this building continues to be a prominent and significant landmark within the multi-church streetscape of College Avenue.



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WEST SOMERVILLE

Throughout this period, West Somerville continued to host extensive tracts of rolling farm land owned by the Tufts, Teele, Cook, and other families, who had been in the area for generations. The construction of the St. James Episcopal Church in 1876 was an indication of the residential growth that was occurring in the area triggered by transportation improvements, as well as a migration of East Somerville families to this end of the City.

Teele Square Local Historic District (Map 22)

This LHD comprises two religious buildings, the church and rectory of **St. James Episcopal Church**, at the corner of Broadway and Clarendon Avenue. The original congregation of the church was formed by the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts in 1875 drawing from the St. James Church in North Cambridge. The chapel-scale house of worship was built in 1876 on Newbury Street in West Somerville, and was later enlarged when it was relocated in 1892 to its present location at **1170 Broadway**. None other than Phillips Brooks, an Episcopal Bishop and the Rector of Trinity Church at Copley Square, presided over its dedication ceremony. This well-preserved church is one of the best examples of the Stick Style in Somerville (see Figures 11–14). Its design encompasses such Stick-Gothic features as a door hood supported by diagonal bracing, pointed arched windows, and the type of steeply pitched roof that is typical of this style. It sits as an important landmark on a major thoroughfare in West Somerville.

The rectory next door to the church at **7 Clarendon Avenue** was built as a single-family residence in 1875-1876. Originally owned by a Boston real estate developer, George H. Tripp, the house was purchased by St. James Church in 1902. The typically Italianate features of the rectory include saw-cut brackets on the front porch, an angled bay, and a deep gable cornice.

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