



Fall 2011 Newsletter

E-Newsletter

September 2011

Iben Snupin: Fred Shibley and the *Mid-Town Journal*

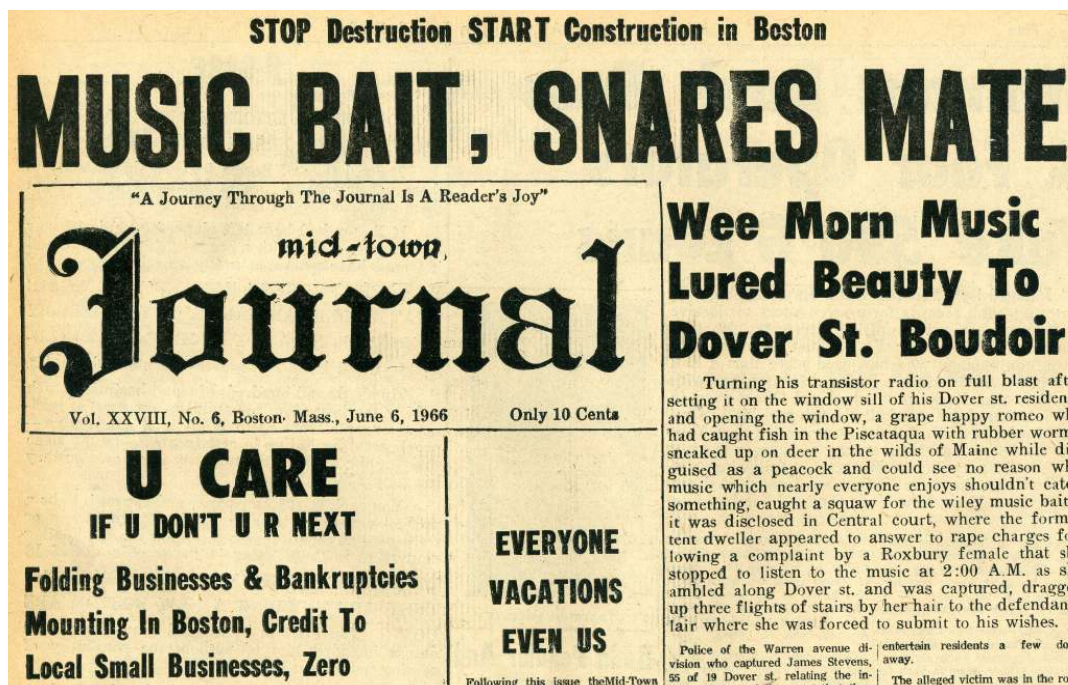
by Alison Barnet

It's a rare South Ender of the 1940s and 1950s who doesn't remember the *Mid-Town Journal* and a rare South End boy of that era who wasn't proud when his exploits were written up—"Front page!" Says one long-time resident, "The *Mid-Town Journal* was *THE NEWS*, the gossip."

The most remarkable feature of this eight-page weekly newspaper was the Iben Snupin column, devoted to "the unbelievable panorama of life in one of the most fantastic sections of the United States—the South End of Boston." A typical entry was:

Neighbors would give a flock of eye teeth to know what happened after that bird on Waltham street gave an impromptu strip-tease in his window and someone went galloping up the stoop shortly after. (Mr. Snupin nose!)

The paper covered without apology the exploits of the "little people"—rooming house landladies, café waitresses, gypsies, and bookies. It reported on knifings in beer joints, orgies in fish markets, and dogs that bit barbers. Colorful terms were used to describe neighborhood characters: "bazos," "stews," "quidnuncs," "dillies," "mugs" and "lavender men."



The last issue, June 6, 1966

Although many people then—and now—dismiss the *Mid-Town Journal* as a scandal sheet, clucking over its excesses and errors, I fell in love with the paper. It's not so much a scandal sheet as a reflection of the publisher's quirky sense of humor and strong sense of place. It's also an important document, perhaps the only written history of the South End area from the 1930s into the 1960s, an observation made by daughter Penelope Shibley.

Frederick Shibley, known as Freddie, was the *Mid-Town Journal's* founder, publisher, reporter, editor, advertising salesman, columnist, and, often, delivery man. He was born on Edinboro Street (now Chinatown) in 1905. His family, like many

Lebanese-Bostonians, gravitated to Shawmut Avenue and then Union Park; the Shibleys ran a rooming house at 40 Union Park for many years. Shibley graduated from the Quincy School and went on to Boston Trade High. At 15 or 16, practicing acrobatics at the Young Men's Christian Union, he came to the attention of a man putting together a tumbling act. Shibley was soon not only a tumbler but a clown, tap dancer, and banjo player on the vaudeville circuit. Taking the stage name Freddie Hayes, he worked throughout the 1920s in shows in New England and New York City, traveling as far west as Colorado with Kid Boots, a Ziegfeld production for dancer/comedian Eddie Cantor.

(Continued on page 2)

(Iben Snupin, continued from page 1)



Shibley at 26 before finding his calling as publisher of the *Mid-Town Journal*.

In New Hampshire one day, while talking about his act in Arabic with two women, he incurred the wrath of a policeman who, later that day in a restaurant, minus his badge, jumped Shibley from behind, so Shibley hit him over the head with a ketchup bottle—an incident that cried out for one of Shibley’s convoluted but yet-to-come *Mid-Town Journal* headlines.

Home in Boston during the Depression, Shibley got into more serious trouble. He was charged with being one of six South End men who robbed a Lowell bank president. Despite the fact that Shibley was identified seven months after the robbery from the back, he was convicted and served time at Concord State Prison. After his release, he did odd jobs—running a dancing school, sand-blasting the front of Trinity Church—until 1938, when, involved with a “do-nothing” WPA vaudeville project in South Boston, he started a

police blotter for Boston’s Midtown (South End, Back Bay, Chinatown, and Roxbury).

From that time on, Shibley spent time in courtrooms as an observer. All of Iben Snupin’s snooping was done in court. He became friendly with policemen, judges, and others who provided him with tips. If a case didn’t have a humorous angle, Shibley gave it one. Humor was the point.

Shibley as Snupin:

In the year 1938 A.D. in the auld town of Boston, Massachusetts a person of questionable literary ability decided to publish a newspaper . . . He borrowed from a friend a writing machine known as a typewriter . . . Before these preparations he had, although not admittedly, scoured the area in which he lived, the South End of the town, and saw many characters whom Charles Dickens . . . might have found more interesting than Scrooge, Martin Chuzzlewit, or his daughters (who conducted themselves in a manner befitting women of their social standing and era, which was in depressing contrast to some of those in this era and area.)

Shibley was a great fan of Dickens and figured if Dickens could write one long paragraph so could he.

Shibley put out the *Mid-Town Journal* from

40 Union Park, moving production to the first floor of a former schoolhouse at 37-41 Rutland Street in 1948. He had been married briefly in the early 1940s. Enter Stella Maroussis (now Phipps), a BU student from New Hampshire. A copy of Shibley’s paper had been delivered to her door by accident; interested in journalism, she and a friend walked down to Rutland Street to see where it was published. She began working with Shibley in 1948; they married in 1956. With their two young children, Richard and Penelope, they took an upstairs apartment in the former schoolhouse in 1961. (The Shibley family was exceptionally helpful to me in my research for this article.)

(Continued on page 3)



Freddie Shibley with son Richard and daughter Penny, early '60s

(Iben Snupin, continued from page 2)

Stella played interesting roles. Shibley liked the horses and sometimes ran full-page columns called “Horses to Watch” and “Payoffs by Harry’s Horses.” Because he was so busy with other aspects of the paper, Stella often became “Handicap Harry,” reading the racing forms and picking out leads. But the first time she went to court in his place, she got a migraine.

At its peak, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the *Mid-Town Journal*, at a nickel a copy, had a circulation of 60,000 and a healthy advertising base of local bars, nightclubs (cafés), and restaurants—Charlie’s Sandwich Shoppe was one of the first. South Enders of that era apparently went out frequently and had a great time.

O’Brien’s Café
1781 Washington,
Opp. Northampton Sta.
Entertainment featuring
Marion Handy,
Queen of Pianists Ethel Fleming,
Song Stylist and
Tommy Heffernan
Our Cuisine is the
Finest You Have Ever Eaten

DeLuxe Café
1241 Washington
DeLuxe Food
DeLuxe Wines

DeLuxe Ales
It’s DeLuxe
When you’re out for an evening

A *Herald* reporter once called Shibley an “unsung genius of the typewriter” and said his “rewrite of the police blotter stands as one of the current wonders of journalism.”

The word play in Shibley’s headlines was his forte—“Beau’s Booze Woo/Booboo: Swan Song/Swain In Lover Groove/Forced To Move; “Goulash Critic Who Hates Work Also/Promises to Slash Mate’s Throat/When He Retains Freedom.” He told a *Harvard Crimson* reporter how he crafted his double-entendres, revealing how much he enjoyed the process.

“I remember one particular headline “Two in Bed, Tangle Lasses.” If you read it fast it sounded peculiar. Another one was “Big Balls Win Gal Prize.” Of course, it was nothing more than a girl attending a drinking party, and wound up in court, she won the prize for large highballs, though she never collected it. You couldn’t put down large highballs, you didn’t have room enough, you only had a certain amount of type, you only had 21 units that you could use, and you had to write the

whole headline, so you got some weird results as a result of being confined to so many units. You kept switching words around until you found what you wanted.”

The *Mid-Town Journal* was not, however, what’s usually thought of as a community paper. My neighbor Dottie, a Cathedral High School student in the 1940s, found it embarrassing not to have a local newspaper that published students’ photos on special occasions, as other papers did. The only pictures in the *Journal* were pin-ups of actresses like Gina Lollobrigida and Kim Novak.

The *Mid-Town Journal* began as a white newspaper in a largely white neighborhood that became much more racially mixed in the 1940s and ’50s. It began running ads for Wally’s Paradise—“Beaucoup Variety Tous les Soirs”—and other black jazz clubs at “Crosstown” (Columbus and Mass. Ave.). Sensationalized crimes now featured more blacks, and they were described in derogatory terms: “Ebony Romeo Warned to Keep Away from ‘Elsie’ After Kids Tell Cops of Ma’s Frolics;” “Visitor Double/Headed by Cutie/and Wild Watusi.”

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2011 Officers and Board of Directors

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The SEHS Newsletter is just one benefit of membership in the Society; a nonprofit organization dedicated to recognizing, preserving and recording the historical, buildings, monuments, parks and artifacts of Boston's South End and through advocacy, outreach, documentation and education to preserve them for future generations.

Individual membership is \$25 per year, Family/Dual memberships are \$40, and opportunities to support the Society at the Supporting (\$100), Patron (\$150) and Benefactor (\$250) levels are also available.

The opinions expressed by the contributors to the newsletter are not necessarily those of the SEHS. Ideas for stories and manuscripts are welcome. Unsolicited manuscripts submitted for possible publication and not used will be returned if they are accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Those interested in reprinting articles must obtain written permission from the editor.

The South End Historical Society
532 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02118
(617) 536-4445
www.southendhistoricalsociety.org

Executive Director:

Hope Shannon

Editor: Shelby Larsson

Contributors: Alison Barnet

Upcoming Events

43rd Annual South End House Tour

A self-guided walking tour of homes in Boston's South End.

Saturday, October 15th

10am to 5pm

Advance tickets:

Advance general tickets are on sale until Friday, October 14th. They are \$25 each. Sponsor tickets, which include admittance to a private party

after the tour, are also on sale. Visit our website at

<http://www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/programs.htm>

or contact Hope Shannon at 617-536-4445 or at

admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org for information

about purchasing tickets in advance and sponsor ticket rates.

Day of Tour tickets:

On the day of the Tour, tickets can be purchased at the Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont Street or Rondeau-Tierney Real Estate, 69 Appleton Street. General tickets are \$30 on the day of the Tour.

On the day of the Tour, cash or check only.

No credit cards.

The Ellis Boston Antiques Show

At the Cyclorama, Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont Street

October 20-23, 2011

Visit <http://ellisboston.com/> for details.

Cast Iron Questions?

Need help restoring, repairing, or replacing your cast-iron fence?

The South End Historical Society can help!

Call or email the SEHS office at

(617) 536-4445 or

admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org

for more information.



Welcome to our new Board Members



The South End Historical Society welcomes
Frances Blair, Meetings and Functions Chair
Adam Kirk Edgerton, Membership Chair
and
Shelby Larsson, Communications and
Publications Chair
to the Board of Directors.

Welcome to our new Members

Lisa and Jeff Case

Elizabeth and Philippe De Montigny

Sylvia Garfinkle

Seth Hankowski

Beth and Timothy Herrick

Claire O'Connor

Floranne Reagan

James and Kimberly Renna

Dan Shannon and Marcia Lloyd

Marc Silvestri

Eric Wolkoff

Elaine Daglio

James Dowd Jr.

Kara and James Gruver

Kay Herbst

Emily Ann Holick

Catherine Powell

Anita Reiner

James Roy

Lisa Stone and Henry Bolter

Christine Wise

(Iben Snupin, continued from page 3)

There were also many snickers over gays:

Certain house below the numbers of 10 and 20 on Worcester Square interior decorated so veddy, veddy grand it hurts to even look inside. And wait'll you get a squint at the eyesome package in gay pajamas who answers the door! Don't rush, boys!

Shibley was something of a wheeler-dealer. In the 1960s, he rented space in the old school-house to a convicted bookmaker known as "Munge" who set up a phone system for transmitting unauthorized early dog race results. When police broke down the door, both men were arrested; the case was dropped when the search warrant proved defective.

By this time, Shibley had become a little unhinged for another reason. The Catholic Church and the Catholic League of

Decency declared the *Mid-Town Journal* scandalous and tried to shut it down. The paper, now distributed throughout Greater Boston and as far away as Providence, lost, by Shibley's estimation, 10,000 sales, particularly in Catholic neighborhoods. In the South End, mom & pop stores that had always sold the paper were intimidated and stopped carrying it. The Boston Public Library had already stopped subscribing because a department head didn't like it. Rep Charlie Iannello of the South End, filed legislation (never passed) to prohibit the paper's "publication and circulation" throughout the Commonwealth, claiming mothers had complained to him that the paper was corrupting their children. A *Herald* writer wryly observed, however, "No child is going to be corrupted by the *Journal's* stories, if only because it would take a Ph.D. to unravel most of its lead paragraphs." Shibley's stance against Urban Renewal undoubtedly made him yet more unpopular with authorities.

Upset by the demolition of the West End, he railed against the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the architecture of new buildings like City Hall and the Prudential tower—"a refrigerator without handles." The paper acquired the words "STOP Destruction START Construction in Boston" above its banner and started running a column called "U CARE." "IF U DON'T UR NEXT" was the idea.

U-CARE, June 6, 1966:

IT HAS BEEN PROVEN TIME AND TIME AGAIN, THAT NO ONE CAN MAKE A CITY MERELY BY CONSTRUCTING A LOT OF HIGH RISE BUILDINGS—
Cities build themselves—
people make cities.

(Continued on page 6)



1972 Prints Available

Pictures from the South End Historical Society's 1972 survey of all extant buildings are available for purchase. The images are digitized and available in jpeg format at 300 dpi. If you are interested in purchasing an image or if you require another format or resolution, please call us at 617-536-4445 or email us at admin@southendhistorical society.org.

(Iben Snupin, continued from page 5)

Shibley questioned “the legality of taking properties by eminent domain and giving them to somebody else” and was disgusted with the inferior construction of housing for people who had been displaced from their neighborhoods.

The last issue was June 6, 1966. “28 years is a long time for anyone to labor continuously,” he wrote. He brooded over his decision for months and then came down with asthma, which a doctor suggested was nerves, but, in 1970, at the age of 65, an asthma attack killed him.

Why had Shibley bothered to keep the paper going during the last years? Did he really think that City Hall would listen to his tirades against Urban Renewal, that he could change anything? The answer might be: it was what Freddie Shibley *did*. He was a quintessential Old South End guy.



Above right: Shibley and his sister Gladys, 1918-1920

Below right: Family group on Shawmut Ave. ca. 1925, From left: Gladys, father Moses, Freddie, Kalil, mother Emma, George



1. Iben Snupin, *Reeling Around*, Boston: Journal Publishing Company, 1945 [Introduction]. *Reeling Around*, a bound collection of Iben Snupen columns, was a bonus to subscribers.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

3. “Fred Shibley—Tumbler and Sandblaster—Started a Newspaper and Was Bankrupted By Catholic Churches and Urban Renewal,” [Harvard] *Crimson Supplement*, November 20, 1968.

4. “Lowell Bank Head Identifies Thug Suspect in \$35,000 Holdup,” *Herald-Traveler*, March 18, 1932.

5. Iben Snupin, *Reeling Around*, Boston: Journal Publishing Company, 1945 [Forward].

6. “Fred Shibley—Tumbler and Sandblaster—Started a Newspaper and Was Bankrupted By Catholic Churches and Urban Renewal,” *The [Harvard] Crimson Supplement*, November 30, 1968; Charles E. Claffey. “Once a scandal, it’s history now,” *Boston Globe*, June 21, 1989.

7. Rudolph Elie, The Roving Eye column, *Boston Herald*, Jan. 7, 1949, p. 38.

8. *Mid-Town Journal*, July 29, 1949.

9. “Fred Shibley—Tumbler and Sandblaster—Started a Newspaper and Was Bankrupted By Catholic Churches and Urban Renewal,” *The [Harvard] Crimson Supplement*, November 30, 1968.

10. *Reeling Around*, August 5, 1938.

11. “Fred Shibley—Tumbler and Sandblaster—Started a Newspaper and Was Bankrupted By Catholic Churches and Urban Renewal,” *Crimson Supplement*, November 20, 1968.

12. Stanley Eames, “Scrofulous Journal Loved For Its Errors,” *Boston Herald*, January 12, 1965.

13. “Fred Shibley—Tumbler and Sandblaster—Started a Newspaper and Was Bankrupted By Catholic Churches and Urban Renewal,” *Crimson Supplement*, November 20, 1968.

14. *Ibid.*



Alison Barnet has lived in the South End since 1964. She is the author of *Extravaganza King: Robert Barnet and Boston Musical Theater*.

Alison Barnet, 2011

Image courtesy of Monika Bach Photography

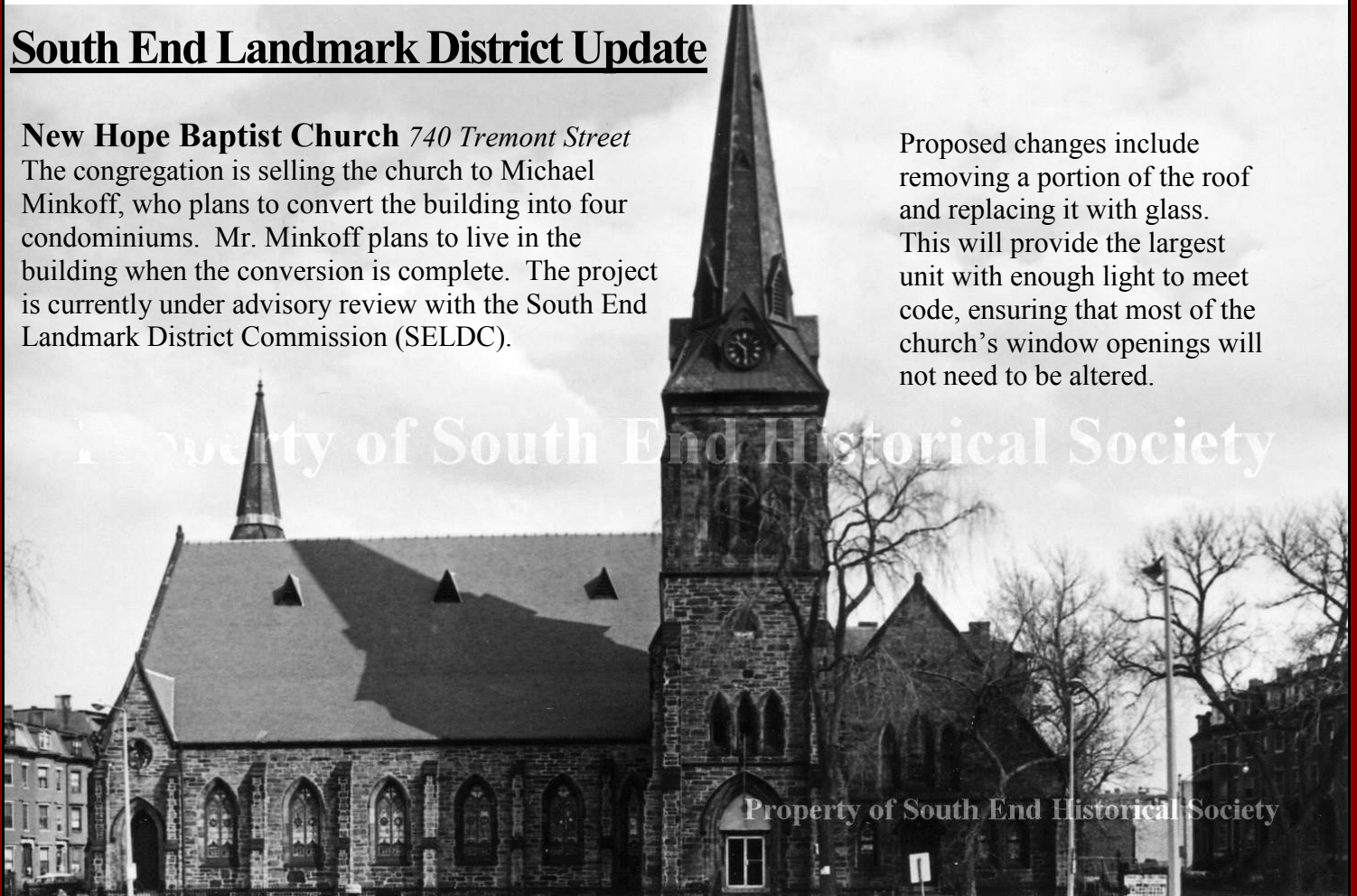
Watch grandson Billy Shibley on Youtube and recognize the critical mind and quirky sense of humor of Freddie Shibley. Billy, Richard’s son, is a 23-year-old journalist who lives in Hollywood.

South End Landmark District Update

New Hope Baptist Church *740 Tremont Street*

The congregation is selling the church to Michael Minkoff, who plans to convert the building into four condominiums. Mr. Minkoff plans to live in the building when the conversion is complete. The project is currently under advisory review with the South End Landmark District Commission (SELDC).

Proposed changes include removing a portion of the roof and replacing it with glass. This will provide the largest unit with enough light to meet code, ensuring that most of the church's window openings will not need to be altered.



Concord Baptist Church

190 Warren Avenue

Peter Zagorianakos appeared before the SELDC in August, continuing the review of an application to convert Concord Baptist Church into condominiums.

At this latest review, the SELDC formed a subcommittee to review a proposed deck on the south face of the roof and warning lights on the entrance to the garage. The subcommittee will report back to the Commission at a future Landmark District hearing.

Both of these images are from our 1972 South End Streets Survey.



Questions for the South End Landmark District Commission?

Call City Hall's Environment Department at 617-635-3850 and ask for the Preservation Planner for the South End. The SELDC holds hearings on the first Tuesday of every month at 5:30 pm in room 801 of City Hall.

Executive Director's Update

Dear Members,

What a summer! Summers around the SEHS are always packed full of activity because it is when most of the planning for our **South End House Tour** happens. We have a great House Tour planned for this year, complete with a home that is only in the hands of its fourth owner (that's in the last 160 years!), one that may be the largest rowhouse in the South End since its extensive renovation, and another that features a very personal and unique decorating style of up-cycled items. Others have been partially restored to their 19th century appearance or remodeled and updated to serve the needs of their 21st century owners.

This summer has been busier than normal, however. We launched our **Oral History project- "Long-Time South Enders: Perspectives on a Changing Neighborhood"**- and will be conducting interviews with long-time South End residents in the coming months. We hope to include excerpts of these interviews in future newsletters and they will be available to the public for research purposes as well.

We are also working on **expanding our selection of Walking Tours**. We have put together a walking tour focusing on churches of the South End and we are developing a few more that concern aspects of the South End's social history. Keep your eyes on your email and on your mailboxes for future tour notifications.

We have been **adding some of the images from our 1972 South End Streets Survey Collection to History Pin**. History Pin is a website that allows users from all over the world to post images. The images are then searchable by geographical location or topic and range from images of recent events or those of events decades ago. We have posted some pictures in the South End from our 1972 collection, allowing users to see what the location looks like now in comparison to what it looked like in our 1972 image. Check out our collection by going to Google and searching "History Pin 1972 South End Streets Survey." It will be the first Google hit. You can also type in the website below, though I realize it's a long link.* We will be adding more images to this collection. While you are on History Pin's website, explore Boston on the map. Historic New England and the Boston Public Library have also added items from their collections.

I hope you enjoy the last vestiges of summer and the first cooler days of autumn. I also hope that I see you on October 15th at our 43rd South End House Tour.



Hope Shannon
Executive Director

* <http://www.historypin.com/collections/view/id/7012019/title/1972%20South%20End%20Streets%20Survey>



Want to get involved?

Right now we need: Volunteers for the House Tour, for administrative tasks, and for our Collections Inventory.

Call me at 617-536-4445 or send me an email at admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org if you are interested in becoming a volunteer. We have over one hundred volunteers who help us every year and we could not continue our programs without their support.



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Want regular updates from us?



Follow us on Twitter and Facebook!

Go to Twitter.com and search for SouthEndHistSoc. For Facebook, go to Facebook.com and search for South End Historical Society. Follow us for regular updates about programs and events both at our organization and in the greater Boston area. We also post trivia, photographs, and facts about South End and Boston history.



*We would like to extend thanks to everyone
who helps to make our South End House Tour possible.*

Thank you to our Corporate Sponsors:

Cast Iron Club, \$1400 guidebook covers

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And to all of our Individual Sponsors, both new and returning,

To Laughlin/Winkler, www.laughlinwinkler.com, and Kate Terrado, www.kateterrado.com, for their graphic design services and continued support of both our House Tour and Spring Ball events,

To Shambalai Plantscapes, LLC, Shabani M. Kuziwa, (p) 781-894-1183, shambalai.plantscapes@verizon.net, for their work on the front garden at South End Historical Society, 532 Massachusetts Avenue,

To Monika Bach, www.monikabach.com, for her photography services during the day of the House Tour and also for her assistance with the Oral History project,

And to our House Tour Committee, House Captains, House Sitters, and other volunteers.

The House Tour is our most successful and popular event but would not be so without your help.

Thank you!

Odds and Ends

Updates to our Newsletter Policy...

In an effort to be more friendly to the environment and to cut down on printing and postage costs, we are no longer sending paper copies of the newsletter to every member. We will send the newsletter through email to those who have provided us with their email addresses.

We will continue to print limited copies of the newsletter for those without email. If you received this in the mail, that means we do not have an email address for you. We hope you will consider providing us with one. If you would like to send us your email address, please send a message to admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org or call (617) 536-4445.

Coming up in our next newsletter...

SEHS President Michael Leabman will share his thoughts on the last year in his Annual Report.



A different sort of South End vista. The spectacular view from one of the roof decks on last year's House Tour. The people in the foreground were also on the House Tour, enjoying another roof deck.

Know somebody who would enjoy this newsletter?

Forward it today and invite them to become a member of the South End Historical Society.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail address: _____ Telephone: _____

Would you prefer that we correspond with you through regular mail or e-mail?

Please circle one: Regular Mail / E-mail

Membership levels (Check One):

___ \$25 Individual ___ \$40 Family/Dual ___ \$100 Supporting ___ \$150 Patron ___ \$250 Benefactor

Please make check payable to: The South End Historical Society

Mailing address: 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118

I am interested in volunteering for:

___ Preservation ___ Spring Ball Committee ___ Membership ___ Programs/Events
___ Newsletter ___ Collections ___ House Tour Sitting ___ House Tour Committee

***New members can also join and pay online by
visiting www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/membership.htm***