Narrative: Boston’s South End Green Spaces

Welcome to NELDHA’s self-guided walking tours of parks, gardens and green spaces in Boston. Our first tour takes the visitor into the South End, a neighborhood of historic residential and institutional properties.

Originally the South End of Boston was a narrow strip of land called the “Neck”, which connected the Shawmut Peninsula of Boston to the Roxbury mainland. Beginning in the early 1800s the City of Boston needed to create additional land suitable for residential development to accommodate a rapidly growing population. By the early 1840s the Industrial Revolution and the accompanying influx of immigrant factory workers transformed the city of Boston. Living conditions in the city became seriously overcrowded with the arrival of workers in need of housing close to the factories. Consequently, many middle class residents abandoned the city and moved to nearby suburbs. The exodus of taxpayers alerted the city government to a need for land expansion to maintain its tax base. Boston’s solution was to fill the tidal flats on the “Neck” with gravel, an early foray in city planning.

The City of Boston planned the South End inserting garden squares within the street layouts. The garden squares were designed to be reminiscent of London garden squares and to attract both developers and the middle class resident taxpayers. Individual buildings were designed and constructed by developers who often used pattern books for their designs, hence the similar designs in groups of buildings.

Today the 19th century garden squares continue to contribute to the quality of life and vibrancy of the South End. In addition, the South End is one of the largest urban Victorian neighborhoods in the United States. This self-guided walking tour includes a sampling of the historic garden squares along with newer parks, gardens and green spaces.

The route is approximately 2 miles in length and can be covered at a leisurely pace in 2 hours.

*Please be aware that many of our old city streets and sidewalks are brick and cobblestone, with some uneven spots. Also note that Tuesday is trash collection day in the South End.
THE SOUTH END SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

The South End tour is a circuit route, which begins and ends at the Back Bay MBTA Station on Dartmouth Street. The route is approximately 2 miles in length and can be covered at a leisurely pace in 2 hours time.

1. SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR PARK. From Back Bay Station cross Dartmouth St. to the park entrance where granite pillars are literary sculptures incised with quotations from contemporary Boston writers. Walk to the fourth block on the left, Braddock Park. This part of the tour includes a small portion of Southwest Corridor Park.

Southwest Corridor Park (1988), a linear public park, continues for approximately 5 miles to the Forest Hills Orange Line Station in Jamaica Plain. The section from Dartmouth St. to Massachusetts Ave. is built on deck above railroad tracks. From there the park continues adjacent to the rail tracks to Forest Hills Station. The park replaced a proposed extension of Interstate Rte. 95 (1972) as a result of citizen protest to the controversial plan. It has been termed an urban zipper joining the South End and Back Bay neighborhoods historically long divided by the rail line.

The park draws the walker along a curvilinear walkway edged with granite walls and raised planting beds, some of which are recycled railroad embankments. Neighborhood spirit is exemplified in the popularity of the community gardens, the tot lot, and the off-leash dog park (Carleton Court Dog Park), all set back from the walkway and enclosed in varieties of hedge plantings. (Other sections of the park contain spray pools, amphitheatres, basketball and tennis courts, and street hockey rinks.) This walking route removed from street traffic is appealing year round; always open, and recommended during daylight hours. Plant list on page 6.

2. BRADDACK PARK. Turn left to enter a traditional South End garden square.

Braddock Park (originally Berwick Park-1869) is small, and intimately charming with post-Civil War brick front row houses and a central linear park. Period style metal fence encloses several ancient English Elm (Ulmus procera) and Japanese Zelkova (Zelkova serrata) trees along with recent replacement tree plantings. Four cast iron bollards protect a cast iron fountain set in an oval granite basin.
3. TITUS SPARROW PARK. Walk to the end of Braddock Park, turn right on Columbus Ave. and walk one block to West Newton St. Turn right at Union United Methodist Church and walk to the park on the left.

**Titus Sparrow Park** (1976) is a year round focal point of the neighborhood. The expansive central lawn sculpted into an amphitheater hosts movie nights and concerts in summer months. Two large granite edged community gardens contain drought tolerant perennials and herbs. Other amenities include a playground, tennis and basketball courts, and shaded areas with benches. A skyline view to the north reveals an interesting layering of architectural styles beginning with the nearby 19th century Victorian brick-front townhouses and beyond the 20th century Prudential and Huntington Ave. towers. The park is named for a South End neighbor and founder of the Sportsmen’s Tennis Club, a Boston youth center providing free tennis programs.

4. HARRIET TUBMAN PARK. Return to Columbus Ave. and cross to the opposite side of the street. Turn left and walk one block to the corner of Columbus Ave. and Warren Ave.

Harriet Tubman Park (2000) commemorates its namesake, the African American abolitionist, known for her work with the Underground Railroad. The sculptures “Step on Board” (1999) by Fern Cunningham and “Emancipation” (1913) by Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller inspired the park’s design by Clara Couric Bachelor. Symbolic tiles designed by school children are set among brick pavers. Beneath a grove of ‘Crimson King’ maples (*Acer platanoides* ‘Crimson King’) a circle of wooden benches surround the “Emancipation” sculpture and affords a welcome shady respite in warm weather. The ‘Crimson King’ variety complements the bronze sculptures and contrasts with the yew hedge and ivy groundcover.

5. JAMES HAYES PARK. Walk two blocks on Warren Ave. to the corner of West Canton St. to James Hayes Park.

**James Hayes Park**, a city park since 1970 and named for a beloved neighborhood resident, the park was redesigned in 1992 by landscape architect, Ann Johnson. The planting material provides a dynamic changing color palette throughout the growing season. Light gray granite curbing and pavers along with cast iron fencing makes for a pleasing contrast with the surrounding historic brick townhouses. A favorite feature of the park is the bronze sculpture “West Canton Street Child” (1992) by internationally acclaimed sculptor, Kahlil Gibran, cousin and namesake of the poet. The park’s award winning architectural design makes it a standout site throughout the year.

*Plant list on page 6.*
6. DARTMOUTH SQUARE CONDOMINIUMS. Cross Warren Ave. at the corner of West Canton St. Walk one block on West Canton St. and turn right on Appleton St. Walk to Dartmouth Square Condominiums on Appleton St. at the corner of Dartmouth St.

The Dartmouth Square Condominium complex (1984) is a conversion of two historic schools – Rice School (1868) and Bancroft School (1868). Originally the center courtyard garden was the shared playground for both schools. While the grounds are private property the courtyard garden is visually accessible from Appleton St. Rhododendrons and pieris frame granite steps that descend from Appleton St. into the center courtyard garden. The garden’s elliptical plan with center fountain surrounded by cast iron fence reflects the essence of the 11 historic South End residential squares. Flowering cherry trees encircle the fountain, and a shrub border of Tatarian Dogwood ground the seating on the brick ring walkway. *Plant list on page 7.*

7. UNION PARK. Turn right on Dartmouth St. and walk three blocks to Tremont St. Cross Tremont St. at the traffic light. Turn left and walk past Upton St. to Union Park on the right.

Union Park (1851) was one of eight garden squares developed by the City of Boston to attract and retain its middle class residents. Modeled on the style of London garden squares, Union Park is a block long elliptical and gated enclosure surrounded by Victorian brick front townhouses original to the square’s layout. The style was well known by the early 1800s as Charles Bulfinch had previously designed several large garden squares in Boston using the London model. Since 1992 the *Union Park Neighborhood Association* has undertaken a number of restoration projects, which include replacement of the garden’s original double row of Elms with a single row of Lindens. The two original fountains and a later cast iron fence have also been restored. The park is visually accessible from outside the fence.

8. BOSTON CENTER FOR THE ARTS PLAZA. Return to Tremont St., turn right and walk to the next traffic light. Cross Tremont St. to the BCA Plaza at the corner of Clarendon St.

The BCA Plaza (1975) was created when the City of Boston closed Montgomery St. east of Clarendon St. transforming a traffic island into a pedestrian plaza. The City supplied funding to create the sun and shade garden designed and planted with assistance from the Arnold Arboretum. One of the City’s oldest and largest zelkova trees provides an important focal point for the garden.

The *Boston Center for the Arts* maintains the plaza and the garden.
9. TWO CLARENDON STREET. Cross Clarendon St., turn right and walk one block to the corner of Montgomery St. to Two Clarendon St.

Originally the Clarendon St. Baptist Church (1869), Two Clarendon Street (1986) is now a residential condominium. A plaque above the door on Montgomery St. offers a brief history of the church. Since the building is close to the street on all sides the garden areas are narrow. Black metal fencing encloses extensive plantings designed by the firm of Carol R. Johnson & Associates. The ‘Snowdrift’ crabapples (*Malus* ‘Snowdrift’) are beautiful in spring bloom and in fall fruit. The gardens are visually accessible from the street. *Plant list on page 7.*

10. WARREN/CLARENDON COMMUNITY GARDEN. Continue on Clarendon St., passing the Boston Ballet building, to the corner of Warren Ave. and the Warren/Clarendon Community Garden.

The Warren/Clarendon Community Garden, (1991) is owned by the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust. The garden enclosed with cast iron fencing and granite posts contains raised beds that are allotted to members of the land trust. The best seasons to visit are spring and summer when flowering shrubs and perennials are in bloom. The garden is locked, but may be viewed from the street.

11. APPLETON STREET. Continue on Clarendon St. one half block to view Gray St. on the right. Continue on Clarendon St. to Appleton St. and turn left.

Gray St., one of the City’s most narrow and picturesque streets, is planted on both sides with ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) trees, and demonstrates an example of successful urban tree selection. The golden yellow foliage in fall is a spectacular sight. Appleton St. exemplifies a 1870s South End neighborhood with its bow front brick townhouses, small “stoop gardens” and some fine examples of original iron-scroll railings. The attractive tree shaded street provides a pleasant walk back to Dartmouth St. and a return to the starting point at Back Bay Station. **Turn right at Dartmouth St. to return to Back Bay Station.**

Material for this tour was researched and compiled by: Rita Christensen, Karen Falb, Kathleen Hoppe, Kathleen Keith, Stuart Ruggles and Susan Juretschke.
SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR PARK

Trees:
- Crabapple (*Malus spp.*)
- Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*)
- Thornless Honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos var. inermis*)
- Silver Linden (*Tilia tomentosa*)
- Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)
- Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)
- London Plane (*Plantanus acerfolia* ‘Blood good’)
- Japanese Stewartia (*Stewartia pseudocamellia*)

Shrubs:
- Azalea (*Rhododendron spp.*)
- Boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*)
- Boxwood (*Buxus microphylla*)
- Spreading Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster divaricatus*)
- Holly (*Ilex spp.*)
- Japanese Holly (*Ilex crenata* ‘Convexa’)
- Hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*)
- Japanese Pieris (*Pieris japonica*)
- Rhododendron (*Rhododendron* ‘P.J.M.’)
- Koreanspice Viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*)

JAMES HAYES PARK

Trees:
- Callery Pear (*Pyrus calleryana* ‘Aristocrat’)
- Austrian Pine (*Pinus nigra*)
- London Plane (*Plantanus acerfolia* ‘Bloodgood’)
- Weeping Willow (*Salix babylonica*)

Shrubs:
- Japanese Holly (*Ilex crenata* ‘Convexa’)
- Betty Prior Roses (*Rosa floribunda* ‘Betty Prior’)

*S specific plant varieties or cultivars are named where they could be identified; otherwise, only the species plant name is given.*
**Dartmouth Square Condominiums**

*Trees:*
- Cherry (*Prunus* spp.)
- Crabapple (*Malus* spp.)
- Bradford Callery Pear (*Pyrus calleryana* ‘Bradford’)

*Shrubs:*
- Bamboo (*Nandina domestica* spp.)
- Boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*)
- Tatarian Dogwood (*Cornus alba* sericea)
- Hinoki Falsecypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* ‘Filocoides’)
- Columnar Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum* ‘Skyrocket’) *
- Japanese Pieris (*Pieris japonica* x’Cavatine’)
- Rhododendron (*Rhododendron* spp.)
- Wall Germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys*) – subshrub in center courtyard garden.

**Two Clarendon Street**

*Trees:*
- Snowdrift Crabapple (*Malus* ‘Snowdrift’)
- Saucer Magnolia (*Magnolia soulangiana*)

*Shrubs:*
- Azalea ‘Delaware Valley White’
- Boxwood (*Buxus microphylla* ‘Tide Hill’)
- Hydrangea (*Hydrangea* spp.)
- Catawba Rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense* ‘Album’)
- Catawba Rhododendron (*Rhododendron* ’Album Elegans’)
- Rhododendron ‘Scintillation’
- Rhododendron ‘Windbeam’
- Spiraea (*Spiraea* spp.)
- American Cranberrybush Viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*)
- Spreading Yew (*Taxus* spp.)