



History of Portland's India Street Neighborhood

Researched and Written by Julie Larry and Gabrielle Daniello, TTL Architects
for the City of Portland's Historic Preservation Office

Early European settlement to the 19th century:

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Although the first house built in Portland by Europeans (in 1632) was located on what is now the corner of Hancock and Pore Streets, whites did not settle in any concentrated numbers in the area until 1680 when Fort Loyal was constructed at the foot of current day India Street. Prior to this time, the settlers, about forty families, had been widely scattered around the Portland area known as Falmouth. Massive destruction of property and the killing or capture of thirty-four Europeans during King Philip's War put an end to this decentralized pattern of settlement. The protection afforded by the fort, however, was short-lived, as the community was again obliterated by a Wabanaki attack in 1690.

English settlers eventually returned to the peninsula. By 1727, about forty families lived near lower King Street (present day India Street), "some of which were respectable," according to the minister at the time, Parson Smith. This concern for respectability will be echoed in later years by city planners, journalists, and reformers fretting about the quality of the residents and housing in the India Street neighborhood. Respectable or not, the town's residents embarked on a period of prosperity and peace, engaged in lumbering, fishing, and commerce.

In 1775, the settlement was destroyed again, this time by the British, and once again, English settlers rebuilt, giving the name Portland to the peninsula when they separated in 1786 from the rest of the settlement area which kept the name Falmouth. Lower India Street (still called King Street until 1837), Exchange Street, and Middle Street became the town's commercial center. By the middle of the century, business was thriving, with men seeking their fortunes in the timber, fishing, and shipbuilding industries, and in the West Indies trade. Little remains from this period, except for the Eastern Cemetery. Even the contours of the waterfront have changed, as the waters of the harbor came up to Fore Street at that time.

19th Century to the Great Fire: the waterfront and the railroad

In the early part of the 19th century, many of India Street's homes were quite fashionable. As early Portland historian Edward Elwell put it, "A highly respectable old street was this previous to the fire of 1866." Three mansions shaded by trees sheltered some of the city's well-to-do. In one of these mansions, the Misses Martin operated a boarding and day school for young ladies; "theirs was the fashionable school of the day."⁴

¹Local Sketches-No. 1, "*Portland Transcript* (Portland, v1E), June 8, 1867.

² Josephine Detmer, *Portland* (Portland: Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc., 1986), 9.

⁰ Edward H. Elwell, *Portland and Vicinity* (Portland, v1E: Lorings. Short, & Harmon and W.S.Jones, 1876). 81.

⁴ Edward Henry Elwell, *the Schools of Portland. From the Earliest Times to the Centennial Year of the Town, 1886* (Portland, ME: William M. Marks, Printer, 1888). 33.

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Life in the surrounding streets revolved largely around waterfront activities. City directories for the 1830s and 1840s provide a glimpse into the kinds of work in which the neighborhood residents were engaged. In 1834, for example, we find coopers, shipcarpenters, mariners, joiners, woodsawyers, truckmen, and laborers, as well as cordwainers (shoemakers), grocers, and widows (as if that were an occupation). The 1847 directory shows mariners, caulkers, seamen, shipmasters, sailmakers, mariners, and traders, bakers, and provisioners. The Sailor's Home on the corner of India and Middle (site of the present-day Micucci's) provided "good accommodation for transient boarders," according to the 1856 City Directory.

Many of the laborers on the docks were African Americans. Slavery had been abolished in Maine in 1783. Census records show that there were 402 blacks living in Portland in 1840, 395 in 1850, and 318 in 1860. Two-thirds of them lived in the streets on the south slope of Munjoy Hill and between the Eastern Cemetery and the waterfront.⁵ The overwhelming majority of the African Americans are listed as either mariners or laborers, with the few other occupations standing out: truckman, window washer, clothes cleanser, hairdresser, grocer, and pastor (Amos Freeman). A mariner's life was often the only livelihood available to free black men. It was a paradoxical situation: a life at sea was seen as morally precarious, yet it also afforded opportunities for respectability.⁶ For many black mariners, stability was difficult to attain, but "black sailors in Portland, Maine, had a degree of residential and occupational stability atypical in larger cities such as Baltimore or New York."⁷ Furthermore, coastal shipping attracted men with families who desired more stability, while "unattached boardinghouse dwellers ... [looked] toward deep-sea voyages."⁸ Most of the crew members aboard the steamer *Portland* were black. When the ship sank in 1898, killing all on board, the tragedy struck Portland's black community especially hard.⁹ After the mid-century point, seafaring opportunities for blacks declined in every port. Several factors contributed to this shift, including a rising number of white immigrants.¹⁰ Still, the 1877 City Directory shows that most African American men worked as mariners or laborers and lived on Hancock or Adams Streets.

Several houses in the neighborhood were originally built for and owned by African Americans. The Abraham W. Niles House at 77 Newbury (extant) was built in 1844. In the 1844 city Directory, in which "people of color" are listed separately, Niles gives his occupation as "mariner." Abraham married Harriet C. Lewis in 1831 and the couple bore a number of children, including a boy named after his father who died of consumption in about 1859 when he was only 18 years old. The Niles family lived at 46 Sumner Street for years, with Mrs. Abraham W. Niles, widowed, still living there in 1858. (Newbury Street was called Sumner Street then, and the whole neighborhood underwent a re-numbering in the 1870s.)

⁵Michael C. Connolly, *Seated by the Sea* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010), 44, and Bob Greene, "Beyond the Abyssinian" in *Maine's Visible Black History*, (Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, 2006), 148.

⁶W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 158, 160.

⁷Bolster, 164.

⁸Bolster, 165.

⁹Elgersman Lee, "Locating Black Portland," in *Creating Portland*, ed. Joseph A. Conforti, (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), 225.

¹⁰Bolster, 222.

Reuben Ruby was an African American who, over the years, worked as a hack driver, a trader, and a messenger for the Customs House. He was also one of the founders of the Maine Anti-Slavery Society and active in underground railroad work.¹¹ He had the house at 81 Newbury Street built sometime between 1853 and 1856 (extant).

The John Parrs House at 16 Federal Street was built ca. 1847 for John Parrs, another African American mariner, who owned several buildings, according to the 1871 Beers atlas. John and his wife Mary raised their children on Sumner Street and in the house on Federal Street. John died in 1876. His widow continued to live at 16 Federal with her son, Braxton, also a mariner. In 1883, Braxton was 2nd steward aboard the steamer *Lewiston*. The same year, he married Amelia Robberson, which might account for his career change -- by 1886, he was working as a porter for the Post Office, and then as a postal clerk until his death in 1893 at the young age of 48. Amelia continued to live in the house until at least 1913.

Abraham Niles and Reuben Ruby were among the founders of the Abyssinian Church. Ruby and five other prominent African Americans of the city published a letter in 1826 in the *The Eastern Argus* in which they protested the way they were treated at the Second Congregational Church in Portland. In 1828, the Abyssinian church at 73 Newbury (then Sumner) Street was built on land sold by Reuben Ruby. The church, the third oldest African American meeting house in the country after those in Boston and Nantucket, also housed a “colored school” for many years, from about 1835 until the Civil War. The Abyssinian’s minister from 1841 until 1851, Reverend Amos Noé Freeman, served as the school’s principal. He organized anti-slavery lectures and served as an Underground Railroad agent.¹² In the 1844 and 1846 directories, Freeman is listed as living at 12 Hancock Street (no longer extant). Another prominent member of the Abyssinian was Charles Frederick Eastman. He owned a barber shop on Fore Street as well as other properties around Portland, and was also a conductor on the Underground Railroad.¹³

The Abyssinian’s relatively small congregation (which included several members who went down with the *Portland*) meant it continually struggled financially. It closed its doors as a church in 1917. The building was used as stable, a store, and an apartment building in the years that followed.

There were white residents in the neighborhood, too, who were active in anti-slavery work. The Portland Anti-Slavery Society met regularly in the 1830s, ‘40s, and ‘50s. Elizabeth Mountfort served as the Society’s secretary for many years. In the 1837 City Directory, she is listed as living at the corner of Fore and Mountfort Streets (site now occupied by Munjoy South development). Samuel and Daniel Fessenden, well-known abolitionists, had their home at 31 India Street (on land that is now vacant). Elias and Elizabeth Thomas also lived on India Street and sheltered runaway slaves and hosted famous abolitionists Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison.¹⁴

¹¹ Bob Greene, “Portland: On the Record: A Look at Early Portland and a First Family,” in *Maine’s Visible Black History*, (Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, 2006), 44.

¹²H.H. Price and Gerald E. Talbot, *Maine’s Visible Black History*, 160.

¹³ Stephen R. Ellis, “The Eastmans,” in *Maine’s Visible Black History*, 48-49.

¹⁴ Price and Talbot, 256.

Beginning in the 1830s, newly arrived Irish immigrants began to displace the African Americans who worked as longshoremen on the waterfront.¹⁵ Many also found work with the railroad, as city directories attest. The Irish settled on the West End of the peninsula in Gorham's Corner, and on the East End, on Munjoy Hill. The center of religious life for those on the East End was the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (307 Congress Street), built in 1869. The Cathedral faces Cumberland Avenue rather than Congress Street. An old story has it that "the bishop chose not to irritate his neighbors whose acceptance of the Catholics was, at best, lukewarm. Thus, he turned his church away from their principal street."¹⁶ In 1875, James Augustine Healy was appointed bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, becoming the first black Catholic bishop in the country. The son of an Irish immigrant father and a mother who was a former slave, Healy's background seems particularly fitting for his role in the diverse community of the India Street neighborhood.

As the number of Irish-born residents increased and as they settled in to life in the New World, they began to band together for mutual aid and support. 1863 saw the incorporation of the Irish American Relief Association. By 1871, they had 150 members. Six years later, the organization was large enough that its officers included a librarian, a bookkeeper, and an assistant bookkeeper; two years after that, the librarian acquired an assistant librarian. The Catholic Union was organized in 1874 in order to provide "assistance to the unfortunate and destitute of its own sect."¹⁷

In the 1840s, a young lawyer named John A. Poor had some ideas that would irrevocably change the look of the India Street neighborhood and the tenor of life in the city. He brought the railroad to the east end of town. After he successfully lobbied for Portland to become Montreal's winter port, groundbreaking for the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railroad (later the Grand Trunk) occurred on July 4, 1845. The terminus and a passenger station were built at the foot of India Street, and, to allow for better connections with the rail lines that served the west end of the city via Union Station, Poor arranged for the construction of Commercial Street, which was completed in 1853, with railroad tracks running down the center of the 100' wide corridor. Poor also founded the Portland Company in 1845 (as the Portland Iron Manufacturing Company) in order to built steam locomotives for the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad. In 1870, a year before his sudden death, Poor was living across town, far from the commotion of his creations, helped out by two Irish domestic servants, Bridget Donovan and Winnie Willey.

Everything ground to a halt in the city on July 4, 1866, when a raging fire destroyed a great portion of the city, including India Street between Congress and Middle, all of Hampshire Street, most of Federal and Sumner (now Newbury) Streets, all of the section of Congress Street under consideration in this study, Locust Street, Smith Street, and Franklin Street from Fore to Oxford Streets. Spared were the eastern portions of Newbury and Middle Streets and Hancock Street

¹⁵ Connolly, 46.

¹⁶ Aileen M. Carroll, *The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and its Bishops* (Portland, ME?: Diocese of Portland?, 1994), 29.

¹⁷ Portland City Directory, 1877.

between Newbury and Fore. The Great Fire was the largest urban fire the United States had seen to that point and it irrevocably changed the look of large portions of Portland.

Post-Fire Rebuilding and early 20th century

In the aftermath of the Great Fire, much of the city was rebuilt in brick. Middle and Exchange Streets remained the focus of the city's commercial activity, with India Street receding in importance. Much of the India Street neighborhood was rebuilt as before, in wood. The fire insurance maps that post-date the fire show the India Street neighborhood as a zone of transition between the residential, working class Munjoy Hill and the prosperous business zone of downtown – as your eye sweeps from Munjoy Hill, predominantly colored yellow, indicating wood frame construction, to the area under consideration here where pink and yellow are interspersed, to the Old Port area, a sea of pink that reflects a heavy investment in masonry construction, this transitional nature is made visually apparent.

The India Street neighborhood was slower to rebuild than parts of downtown. In 1868, one newspaper writer noted that “since the fire this famous thoroughfare which owns a historic name of its own has been almost completely neglected by the property owners and capitalists.” (*Portland Evening Star*, June 12, 1868) Even before the fire, though, reporters had commented on the street's apparent decline. In 1867, one writer noted, “Previous to the great fire of 1866 the lower part of the street had undergone great changes; its old mansions were converted into taverns, its old houses broke up into shops and saloons. But the upper portion of the street maintained its staid and respectable character.” (*Portland Transcript*, June 8, 1867) And yet another writer waxed elegiac in this 1869 observation: “The street was early settled by highly respectable families, and their mansions, sheltered by wide-spreading elms, adorned its length ... All these are now gone, and desolation spreads around.” (*Portland Transcript*, August 21, 1869)

Despite the doom-and-gloom reports, however, people were rebuilding. By October 1867, Horatio Quincy had built the brick house at 73-75 Federal Street (extant) on the site of his former residence and was living in one unit, while the other unit was listed for sale. In 1868, John Gulliver built a multi-family brick house at 69-71 Federal Street (extant). He had previously lived in a frame house on this site. The North School was built in 1867. The largest elementary school in the state at the time, employing 26 teachers and enrolling 1200 students, it was also the first school in Portland to separate children into different grades according to age. The North School is also significant because of programs such as manual training and its “school banking” system that were designed to help the immigrant and first-generation children it served.¹⁸

There are many other buildings that were constructed right after the fire: 306 Congress St. (1867), 316 Congress (1866-67), 23 Hampshire St. (1867-68), 24 Hampshire St. (1866-67), 60-62 Hampshire St. (1867), to name a few. Both St. Paul's Anglican Church and the Cathedral were built in the late 1860s after the original churches burned. Also in 1867, the Eagle Sugar Refinery was built on Fore Street, at the foot of Mountfort Street, to convert imported molasses into sugar. Only New York imported more molasses than Portland in the early to mid- 19th

¹⁸ Martha Deprez, *Maine Historic Preservation Commission Survey*, 2001.

century.¹⁹ By 1860, Portland was exporting more molasses than any other American city, 20% of the nation's total.²⁰

Almost all of the residential buildings constructed in the neighborhood after the fire were multi-family dwellings, reflecting Portland's increasingly urbanized character and the neighborhood's rapidly growing population. India Street served as a transportation hub, with large numbers of people coming and going via the railroad, the streetcars, and the steamships that docked at the foot of India. Conspicuous by its absence from today's landscape is the railroaod, an enormous (literally and figuratively) feature of the neighborhood. In 1903, the old Grand Trunk Station was demolished to make way for an imposing new one. Behind the station loomed the grain elevators. Three different streetcar lines stopped at the Grand Trunk Station around 1915. The cars ran every twenty to thirty minutes throughout the day. There were weekly steamer trips to Liverpool, tri-weekly to Bangor and New York, and daily to Boston, along with the trips scheduled by the seven transatlantic lines that had their offices in the Grand Trunk office building. 4,000 immigrants per year entered the port of Portland throughout the 1890s. By 1910, the city directory shows large numbers of Italians and Eastern European Jews living in the India Street neighborhood, alongside the earlier Irish immigrants. The 1920 Census, on Federal Street alone, lists the following countries of origin: Scotland, England, Ireland, Finland, Estonia, Sweden, Russia, Portugal, Poland, Lithuania, and Canada. Residents claimed the following occupations: tailor, cutter in shirtwaist factory, junk shop, laborer for railroad and wharf, cabinet maker, and fruit peddler, among others.

The early 1880s saw increasing numbers of Jewish immigrants settling in the city, fleeing the pogroms in the Russian empire and Austria-Hungary. Most of them settled on and around Hampshire Street, and many of them started out as peddlers, working to save enough money to open retail shops. Isaac Abrams was one of the early Jewish merchants who did well enough to build a brick block on Middle Street (see 59 Middle Street, the Abrams Block).²¹

Shaarey Tphiloh, at 147 Newbury Street, was erected in 1904 to serve the neighborhood's Jewish population, which until then had not been large enough to support a free-standing synagogue. (People had met for services in private homes.) Most of the synagogue's early records are in Yiddish, reflecting the Eastern European background of the congregants.²² Shaarey Tphiloh's congregation had mostly moved to the suburbs by the 1950s, so a new Shaarey Tphiloh was built on Noyes Street; the Newbury Street building now houses several businesses. Etz Chaim, established in 1921 at 267 Congress Street, is the only surviving example of a traditional

¹⁹ Detmer, 30.

²⁰ David Carey Jr., "Comunidad Escondida: Latin American Influences in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Portland," in *Creating Portland*, ed. Joseph A. Conforti, (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), 96.

²¹ Benjamin Band, *Portland Jewry: Its Growth and Development* (Portland, ME: Jewish Historical Society, 1955), 14-16.

²² Candace Kanés, "Shaarey Tphiloh, Portland's Orthodox Synagogue," http://www.mainmemory.net/sitebuilder/site/2101/slideshow/1206/display?use_mmn=1&prev_object_id=3466&prev_object=page. Accessed 7/9/2013.

European synagogue that is still being used for religious purposes.²³ It was founded by a dissident group that was not pleased with the way things were going at Shaarey Tphiloh. The 1909 Sanborn map shows a Hebrew School located across the street at 148 Newbury (building extant). The school existed at that location until 1919 when it moved to Pearl Street. In 1912, the director of the school was Schachno Stein, an exile from Russia who believed fervently in the power of education.²⁴ Mr. Stein was assisted in his work by three other teachers, including Isaac Weisberg who lived next door at 144 (146) Newbury Street.

Italian immigrants were the next wave. They began arriving in large numbers around the turn of the last century. They worshipped first at the Cathedral on Cumberland Avenue, then, in 1911, were allowed to hold services of their own in a converted stable on Federal Street. St. Peter Parish Church (72 Federal Street) was built in 1929. When the Msgr. Teresio DiMingo arrived in Portland to take on the duties as pastor of the new church, there were 700 families in the parish. At the time of his 50th Anniversary celebration, the parish served 1,150 families.²⁵

The India Street neighborhood absorbed all these newcomers (not always graciously, alas), as well as arrivals from Canada and the Scandinavian countries. Taverns, hotels, and small businesses (junk shops, fruit shops, restaurants, pool halls, bakeries, livery stables, plumbing, dry cleaning, and shoe repair businesses, etc.) served the various, everyday needs (not all of them legal) of the many people living in or passing through the neighborhood. The neighborhood provided a home for people who were not necessarily welcome in other parts of the city (as was the case for many immigrants and minorities) or who did not wish to participate in the fixed, stable life of the middle class (the many lodgers and transients who passed through). City directories and census reports show large numbers of lodgers living with families in their apartments, lodging houses, and numerous hotels. For example, at 6 India Street (no longer extant), Patrick Connors ran a boarding house; in 1910, he had two dozen boarders ranging in age from 20 to 56, mostly men from Massachusetts or Ireland. Michael and Mary Grace Paolino shared their 41 India Street (no longer extant) home with four Italian lodgers. Annie Israelson also ran a boarding house at 76 India Street (extant). Lodgers roamed free of the ties that acted as a restraint on family dwellers. A lodger could be anyone. The same held for the people who frequented the neighborhood's many hotels. "[H]otel people seemed to be forming subcultures that deepened the social schisms of the time and weakened the cultural hegemony of the middle and upper classes," argues Paul Groth.²⁶ At least two of the India Street hotels featured frequently in the papers because of robberies, brawls, even murder – the Florence Hotel (45 India Street, now Micucci's) and the Liverpool Tavern (corner of India and Commercial).

The history of the Florence Hotel encapsulates, in some respects, the history of the neighborhood, which, in turn, mirrored the larger historical changes that were sweeping across

²³ Ann S. Kim, "A Portland Synagogue Begins a Renovation," *Portland Press Herald*, (Portland, ME), Dec. 14, 2009, B1. <http://search.proquest.com.ursus-proxy-9.ursus.maine.edu/mainenews/docview/277398207/13E76036B727DB60C6E/21?accountid=17222>

²⁴ "Hebrew School Newbury Street," *Portland Sunday Telegram* (Portland, ME), July 7, 1912, p. 8.

²⁵ Joseph E. Coyne, "Clergy, Parishioners to Honor Msgr. DiMingo's 50th Anniversary," *Portland Press Herald* (Portland, ME), Sept. 18, 1961.

²⁶ Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 22.

the nation in the 19th and 20th centuries, including the shift away from a maritime economy, the influx of immigrants, and Prohibition. In 1830, prosperous merchant Stephen Waite built a brick mansion on the spot. There were other mansions in the vicinity, including the house in which Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born and General Fessenden's house. "The street was early settled by highly respectable families, and their mansions, sheltered by wide-spreading elms, adorned its length."²⁷ After Waite's death, his house was enlarged in 1854 to provide room for up to one hundred sailors, reflecting the importance of the waterfront at the time. Having survived the fire, the hotel took the name American House in 1866, then became the Eagle House in the 1880s, and then in 1915, it became the Florence Hotel. In 1891, under the management of A.E. Pratt, the hotel received a favorable write-up in a book about local businesses. It had 51 guest rooms, recently refurbished, nine personable employees, a first class livery stable.²⁸ In 1928, it was the site of an unsolved murder, and in 1930, arson claimed the building.²⁹ At the time of the fire, the hotel had been vacant for several weeks, except for a meat market on first floor, and the hotel owner, Joseph Vacchiano, was in jail, serving time for liquor charges.³⁰ Shortly after the fire, A.M. Siciliano applied for a permit to remove the top two stories of the fire-damaged structure in order to create a two-story tenement building with assembly room and store. In 1965, Leo Micucci opened the Italian grocery store at the address.

Joseph and Rosina, the Florence proprietors, are mysterious figures flitting through the city directories, alternating periods of restlessness with stability, changing their names slightly as they go. (Although, to be fair, it is difficult to know how much of the name changing was done intentionally on their part and how much was due to lack of comprehension on the part of the note-takers and clerks. The Eastern European and Italian names in city directories and census reports show remarkable variations and inconsistencies in spelling and transcription, even within a single edition of a directory.) In 1916, Joseph was a butcher working at 43 India Street. In 1925, Jiosuelo and Rosina are described as grocers at 45a India, and proprietors of the Hotel Florence at 43 India, where they also lived. In 1931, a year after the fire and Joseph's jail time, Joseph and Rose are grocers at 94 Congress, living at 92 Congress. Then in 1939, Joseph and Rosa appear as proprietors of a Meat Market at 225 ½ Congress Street, across from the Eastern Cemetery. The 1947 Directory has the same listing for them, and also reveals the wide variety of shops and services the two block area of Congress Street supported: the Munjoy Co Dept Store (223 Congress), Garbarino Fruit (227 Congress), George J. Catir dry goods (231 Congress Street), McDonough's Drug Store (235 Congress), Eskilson's Fish Market (237 Congress). There was also a laundromat, a jewelers, a beauty salon, shoe repair, cleaners, grocery store, bakery, and a variety store. This was 1947, before the era of large suburban supermarkets and shopping malls.

Immigrant families used the public street as gathering space; the many lodgers who rented rooms in the neighborhood frequented the local billiard halls and saloons; longshoremen, obligated by

²⁷ *Portland Transcript*, (Portland, ME), Aug 21, 1869.

²⁸ George Fox Bacon, *Portland: Its Representative Business Men and Its Points of Interest* (Newark, NJ: Glenwood Pub. Co., 1891), 142.

²⁹ Harold Boyle, "Arson Ended Hotel's Life," *Evening Express*, (Portland, ME), March 13, 1982.

³⁰ "Officials Hunt for Person Who Set Hotel Fire," *Portland Press Herald*, (Portland, ME), April 18, 1930.

the nature of the job to spend many hours simply waiting, also found the local taverns congenial. “Home” extended to the public streets and public buildings of the neighborhood.³¹

Public health reformers saw cause for alarm in the crowded streets and dwellings of the neighborhood. In 1911, the city opened a milk station, renting two rooms in the Dispensary which was then located at 55 India Street. (The Dispensary was organized in 1904.) When the building at 65 India Street was built in 1912 on land and with funds donated to the Bowdoin College’s Medical School, the milk station moved into rooms there. Portland’s milk nurse was Lillian O’Donahue, the American-born daughter of immigrant parents. Lillian and her sister, Eleanor, who worked as a teacher at the North School, were among the many Irish American women who chose “nursing and school teaching as career paths in order to gain independence.”³² The milk station was no longer needed by 1920, because regulations and oversight of the milk industry meant a cleaner, purer supply of fresh milk.³³ The Edward Mason Dispensary remained open until 1921, when the Medical School was closed down because it was considered so far below standard. Bowdoin gave the building to the city with the stipulation that free clinics be offered. At various times, the building has housed the Arnie Hanson Center for the treatment of alcoholism and is currently the home of the Milestone Foundation.

The neighborhood during the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century also had its share of heavy industry. The Thomas Laughlin Co. was founded by Thomas Laughlin in 1866. In the beginning, they made marine hardware by hand at their forge on Commercial Street, moving to the neighborhood by the 1890s, onto land and buildings formerly occupied by the Eagle Sugar Refinery. An 1886 map of Portland shows several large buildings on the block bounded by Fore, Hancock, Newbury and Mountfort Streets that are identified as “to be occupied by the Thos Laughlin Co Block Mkr.” Before the turn of the century, they had adapted to changing times, diversifying into the manufacture of items required by land industries such as mining and railroading. By 1904, they had seven shops and over a hundred employees, and were praised in the Board of Trade Journal for “the quiet, diligent manner in which the workmen perform their duties...”³⁴ Forty-six years later, however, a reporter for the Sunday Telegram magazine wrote about the earth-shattering, ear-splitting sounds of the drop forge plant, where “the loudest shout is lost in a constant thunder of sound.”³⁵ At that time, the company rang with the sounds of two hundred employees and twelve drop furnaces, the largest of which delivered a blow of a million pounds.

Working from photographs, maps, and texts, it is difficult to conceive of the auditory landscape of the time. The Thomas Laughlin Company, along with the Grand Trunk Railroad and the Portland Company complex (adjacent to the Grand Trunk railyards, between Fore Street and the waterfront at the foot of Munjoy Hill), was one of “three heavy hitters” in the area, heavy

³¹Gabrielle Daniello, “Ghost Street” (master’s thesis, University of Southern Maine, 2007), 51.

³² Annette K. Vance Dorey, “The Milk connection: Portland’s Infant Milk Station and Public Health Education,” in *Maine History* 38, no. 2, Fall 1998, 140.

³³ Dorey, 152.

³⁴*Board of Trade Journal* 16, no. 9 (January 1904): 305.

³⁵Franklin Wright, “The Story of Local Drop Forge Plant,” *Maine Sunday Telegram magazine* (Portland, ME), July 9, 1950.

industries whose sounds and smells would have characterized the neighborhood.³⁶ Other factories included the Burnham, Morrill Co. Canning Factory and a Mineral and Soda Water Factory, both on Franklin Street. (There is a small thread connecting The Portland Company on one side of the neighborhood with the canning factory on the other side: The Portland Co manufactured large cast bean pots for Burnham, Morrill. The company was also responsible for all the equipment and paddle wheels on the steamer *Portland*, the very ship that sank in 1898, taking so many of the neighborhood's African American men and women down with it.³⁷) In an 1899 souvenir book published by the Portland Evening Express, note is made of the noise of the thriving industry and transportation of the city. But, the writer declares, "the residential portions of the older part of the city cover the tops and slopes of the two hills, Munjoy and Bramhall, elevated far enough above the level of the business streets to escape the smoke and odors, the noise and dust of traffic."³⁸ He goes on to discuss the easy accessibility of the suburbs, allowing Portlanders to live at a comfortable distance from "the nerve-trying bustle of business."³⁹ The residents of India Street, Hampshire, Federal, Newbury, etc. had no such escape from the commotion.

In the early years of the 20th century, this was a landscape of tenement houses, triple deckers, and other multifamily dwellings, small storefronts that could be quickly and easily erected and changed (see 74 India Street, the Annie Israelson store, and 72 India Street, the Peter Tabachnik store, as well as the Coffee by Design building at 67 India), and industrial buildings such as the various structures that made up the Thomas Laughlin Company and the grain elevators behind the Grand Trunk station, punctuated by a handful of grand structures: the Shaarey Tphiloh on Newbury Street, St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church (although not until 1929), the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, North School, the Grand Trunk station.

Decline and Depression years

From 1915 to 1922, about four-fifths of Canada's grain exports passed through the Grand Trunk yards. In 1923, Canada began looking towards its own ports to handle its grain exports; by 1925, the amount of cargo handling in Portland had dropped by 50%. In 1932, the Grand Trunk canceled its 999 year lease. As waterfront activity decreased, India Street showed a corresponding decrease in commercial activity. In 1915, only four buildings on India Street are listed as vacant in the city directory. In 1927, there were sixteen vacant buildings and in 1930, there were twenty-three. The Great Depression exacerbated the situation. As in the rest of the country, banks and businesses failed, real estate values and incomes decreased, and the city struggled to meet the costs of providing relief. The 1935 City Directory paints a bleak picture: all the buildings on India Street between Middle and Newbury were vacant, except for the City Dispensary at #65 and the India Street Cash Market at #67 on the odd-numbered side of the street, and a shoe repair shop and one resident on the other side of the street. Similarly, the block

³⁶Edward L. Hawes, "The Dirty History of Portland Harbor," (Portland, ME: Casco Bay Estuary Partnership), 1994. Accessed online at www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu/pdfs/dirtyhistory.pdf

³⁷ David H. Fletcher, *The Portland Company 1846-1982* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2002), 122.

³⁸ C. Bancroft Gillespie, *Portland Past and Present* (Portland, ME: Evening Express Publishing Company, 1899), 22.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

between Fore and Middle was almost all vacant, except for Gimple Lerman's furniture store, a gas station, a lunch place with apartments above (#39, now gone), and Raphael Cartonio's grocery store at 45 India. Defense spending during the second World War finally brought an end to the economic troubles of the 1930s.⁴⁰

There appears to have been some construction in the area in the 1920s and 1930s, especially as the need to accommodate the automobile gained steam. Livery stables, such as Daniel Larrabee's at 61 India Street and Murray Brothers Livery at 54 Hampshire Street, give way to one-story garages (55-63 Federal Street built in 1927, 50 India Street built in 1938, and 72-88 Middle Street, built by John Calvin and John Howard Stevens in 1922).

Post World War II years and the latter part of the 20th century: demolition and renewal

The war over, the city started to tackle what it perceived as problems on the home front. 1951 saw the creation of the Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Authority, but city officials had begun thinking about "the problem of the central city" much earlier. In a report published by the Portland City Planning Board in 1946, the planners strike a patriotic note when they ask, "Will those who sent their sons out to fight a war on foreign shores approach the achievement of a better and more spacious way of living at home, as fearlessly as their sons did abroad?"⁴¹

The India Street neighborhood abuts two other neighborhoods that were slated for clearance and redevelopment in the post-war years: the Vine-Deer-Chatham area (between Middle and Fore Streets, west of Franklin) and Munjoy South (northeast side of Mountfort Street). Half the population of Vine-Deer-Chatham, not unlike the India Street neighborhood, was Italian, either foreign-born or first generation. Other residents included Russian-born Jews and Armenians. Residents did not take kindly to their neighborhood being called a "slum" and rejected plans for their removal. They did not prevail, but the authorities, in a report about the relocation project express, in the end, an understanding of the residents' attachment to the place. "The neighborhood was a necessity, either economic or psychological: -- [because] members of minority groups, especially non-white, were accepted there; [and] the restrictions by landlords in other neighborhoods against large families were not prevalent here..."⁴²

Demolition work on the streets of "blight" began in 1956. By 1961, Jordan's Meats factory occupied the block bounded by Fore, Middle, India, and Franklin Streets.) Another component of the renewal project involved the widening of Franklin Street. Demolition of the homes and shops on parcels of land needed for the project began in 1967. Present day Franklin Arterial is between 68' and 178' wide.

⁴⁰ Joel Eastman, "From Declining Seaport to Liberty City," in *Creating Portland*, ed. Joseph A. Conforti, (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), 277.

⁴¹Portland City Planning Board, *Urban Redevelopment for Portland* (Portland, ME: Portland City Planning Board), 1946.

⁴²Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Authority, *Vine-Deer-Chatham Project: Relocation, a Community Effort* (Portland, ME: Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Authority), [1959], 5.

Although 50% of the displaced residents in the Vine-Deer-Chatham relocation effort were Italian, Italians maintained a strong presence in the India Street neighborhood, strong enough that the area was dubbed “Little Italy” and several Italian-owned businesses thrived. In 1950, Leo Micucci founded the grocery and wholesale business that bears his name, moving into the 45 India Street building in 1965.

Giovanni Amato is credited with creating the iconic sandwich known as the Italian. He lived at 122 Newbury Street (no longer extant – see 1924 tax photo) and operated a bakery at 67 India Street (present day Coffee by Design shop) from 1902 until 1921, when he moved his home and business into the larger building at 71 India Street (present day Amato’s Sandwich Shop now occupies the site, although the current building was built in 2000). The move was precipitated by a fire in 1921 at 67 India Street and the larger space accommodated his expanding family – the 1920 Census reveals that the couple had 10 children living at home at the time, from 19 year old son John to the baby, Frank. In 1930, the business had grown to become a grocery store, and by 1945, the family had started a bakery (again), back at their old building at 67 India. The Amato’s chain of stores has now spread across Maine and New England.

Vincenzo and Maria Reali started the Village Café at their home on Newbury Street (current site of the Bay House Development) in 1936, serving only a handful of people at a time. Son Amedeo took it over, expanding the restaurant several times over the decades, including in 1973 when the expansion allowed for seating 180 people, and then again in 1986, after which the restaurant could hold over 400 people. The restaurant was torn down in 2007 to make way for condominium development.

Many Eastern European immigrants also established businesses in the area, including Philip and Jacob Levinsky, who started their business selling military surplus out of a shop on Washington Avenue, opening their flagship store on the corner of India and Congress in 1920. Business was so good in the 1970s and ‘80s that the store expanded many times, and by 1978 sustained 75 employees. In 1997, Levinsky’s moved downtown, the building was razed, and in 1999, the Family Practice Center, an outpost of the Maine Medical Center, was constructed on the corner site.

The latter half of the 20th century also saw the demolition of the house on the corner of Fore and Hancock where the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born. In 1807, the year the poet was born, the house belonged to a sea captain and at the time, the waters of Casco Bay came almost right up to the house (all the land that now exists between the site and the bay is fill). Sometime in the 20th century, a hockshop occupied the site, and by 1955, when the dilapidated building was torn down, it was owned by the Thomas Laughlin Company which was looking to expand its operations.⁴³

The Grand Trunk station was torn down in 1966. It had stopped serving passengers by this time; instead, a discount grocery store occupied the former waiting room.

⁴³“Longfellow Landmarks Fast Disappearing,” *Portland Evening Express* (Portland, ME), Feb. 27, 1956.

Some of the demolition and renewal projects led to still further demolition. In 1971, the City Council voted to rezone part of the block bounded by Congress, India, Federal, and Hampshire Streets. Michael Taliento of Federal Super Markets requested the zoning change because his business (Federal Super Market at 94 Federal Street) had been hurt by the construction of the Arterial and he hoped to build a shopping center on the lot. Approval was granted, and twenty-one families had to be relocated to accommodate the construction of a 14,000 square foot supermarket, 2,400 square foot laundromat, 3,500 square foot drug store, 1,500 square foot doctor's office, and 100 parking spaces. The buildings at 69-79 Federal Street and 90-104 India Street were spared the wrecking ball.⁴⁴

Labor lawyer Steven Sunenblick is sometimes credited with sparking a revitalization of the neighborhood with his purchase and rehabilitation, in 1983, of the fire house at 97 India Street. Other small businesses followed, including Hugo's Restaurant in 1988 and Cycle Mania in 1989. In 1988, Gardner Square Partners bought the former Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue, which had been abandoned in 1976 when the congregation moved to Noyes Street. Van Dam and Renner Architects converted the interior into nine business spaces.⁴⁵ In 1994, when Fred Forsley applied for and was granted tax credits in order to renovate the former Crosby-Laughlin site on Fore Street, the buildings had been vacant for years, falling into disrepair. "Portland was eager to approve the plan because it will help rehabilitate the blighted 4-acre site."⁴⁶ Coffee by Design moved to its location at 67 India Street in 1998, the same year that Levinsky's "odd assemblage of buildings on Congress Street" was demolished to make way for Maine Medical Center's outpatient clinic.⁴⁷

21st Century

The economy of the neighborhood has mirrored national trends, relying first on maritime activities, then on the railroad, moving from industrialization, through the de-industrialization of the 20th century, to a shift towards a service and tourist economy. In 2006, what had been the Breakaway Tavern on the corner of India and Fore Street was demolished. That land still sits vacant, but behind it, a Residence Inn by Marriott has gone up, along with a multi-level parking garage. In 2005, Jordan's Meats closed its doors and sat empty for five years until a fire gutted the building. Phase I of a redevelopment plan for the site has been accomplished – the construction of a Hampton Inn, Sebago Brewing Co. restaurant, and Portside Condos. Phase II,

⁴⁴ "Shopping Area Decision is "Draw" for Contestants," *Portland Evening Express* (Portland, ME), June 22, 1971, and Frank Sleeper, "Supermarket Building New City Complex," *Portland Evening Express* (Portland, ME), April 12, 1972.

⁴⁵ Lloyd Ferris, "Converted in Practice, The Spirit Survives..." *Portland Press Herald* (Portland, ME), April 14, 1996. <http://search.proquest.com.ursus-proxy-9.ursus.maine.edu/mainenews/docview/276750444/13E994D39AB6554B246/2?accountid=17222>

⁴⁶ Stephen M. Greenlee, "Council Gives Brewery Tax Relief," *Portland Press Herald* (Portland, ME), May 10, 1994.

⁴⁷ Steven G. Vegh, "Former Levinsky's To Be Razed For Clinic," *Portland Press Herald* (Portland, ME), Aug 31, 1998. <http://search.proquest.com.ursus-proxy-9.ursus.maine.edu/mainenews/docview/276858256/13E992C79743A815978/10?accountid=17222>

intended to develop street-level retail, offices, and more condos, was approved in August 2012. The Village Café shut down in 2007; construction workers are currently at work building the Bay House development which is to include market-rate apartments, a parking garage, and retail space. Federal Street saw a flurry of construction, too, with the Federal Street Townhouses project consisting of seven condos reaching completion in 2007. A *Mainebiz* article of 2007 discusses seven projects and proposals for various sites in the study area, some of which are completed as of this date, while others have been considerably revised and still others remain up in the air.⁴⁸ Most of the construction in the area acknowledges the tourist industry as the driving force behind Portland's economy. The redevelopment of this neighborhood has proceeded in a stop-and-go fashion as some projects were halted or scaled back by the recession and neighborhood residents debated height restrictions.⁴⁹

Conclusion

For more than three hundred years, people have been discussing the decline and revitalization of the India Street neighborhood. A transitional area between the largely residential Munjoy Hill and the tourist and commercial center of the Old Port and Commercial Street, the neighborhood has struggled with the lack of a clearly defined identity. It defies easy categorization, slipping in and out of decline, embracing change and rejecting it, providing opportunities for those with grand visions for society or for those seeking out lifestyles and activities outside the mainstream.

⁴⁸ Kerry Elson, "Going East," *Mainebiz* (Portland, ME), April 30, 2007.

⁴⁹ E.D. Murphy, "'Stalled Projects' Tied to India Street Blight," *Portland Press Herald* (Portland, ME), Nov. 29, 2010. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/814677952?accountid=17222> and Randy Billings, "India Street: Tall Things Considered," *Portland Press Herald* (Portland, ME), June 13, 2012. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1020127460?accountid=17222>