

Railroad viaduct under construction, 1890s photographs courtesy of the City of Brockton Department of Engineering
The elimination of grade crossings was a major civil engineering project. Undertaken jointly by the town and the Old Colony railway, it segregated rail from pedestrian and carriage traffic, greatly improving efficiency for getting materials in and out of the factories and safety for everyone traveling in or through Brockton. The viaduct also radically altered the appearance of the downtown area, elevating the track in some instances by 15 feet and lowering it elsewhere to a depth of 12 feet. Many of the laborers on the viaduct were recent immigrants to the country, for whom this impressive construction was probably their first job in the new world.



Grover Factory Fire, March 20, 1905

A boiler explosion in this shoe factory (located at Main and Calmar Streets) caused the worst fire in Brockton's history, taking 58 lives. The boiler was shot like a giant projectile through the factory and crashed into a house several hundred feet away. The ensuing fire destroyed many of the surrounding buildings including the Dahlborg Block (visible in the left of the photograph) and several private dwellings. A relief fund was organized to aid the victims and their families and to pay for a memorial for the 35 dead whose bodies were too disfigured to be identified.

The Crescent Street Arch under construction, circa 1895. The wooden centering supporting the voussoirs (the radial stones forming the arch) is still in place. At this stage of the construction the grade level remains high for ease of working. Later, the finished road grade would be some feet lower to achieve the required headroom.



Terra cotta details, Sampson Funeral Home (formerly the Gardner Kingman house), Main Street (#18)

The use of ornamental terra cotta, imported from Europe, began to flourish in New England in the last quarter of the 19th century. It allowed for elaborate and colorful decorations on building facades and had the additional virtues of being both fireproof and indestructible. The first use of American-made terra cotta was on Trinity Church in Boston, completed in 1877, about ten years before the Gardner Kingman house was built. It seems probable that the terra cotta used on this and other buildings in Brockton came from the first significant East Coast supplier, the Boston Terra Cotta Company which was set up in 1880.



A Church Outing at the turn of the century

The first two Black churches in Brockton, the Lincoln Congregational Church and the Messiah Baptist Church were both founded in 1897. That year, their members went on the first of several annual joint picnics. Renting trolleys took them to Mayflower Grove, a park in the neighboring town of Hanson. Here they are, setting out from the corner of Crescent and Main Street. The District Courthouse now stands on the site of the Standard Supply Company visible in the background. On the left, at the corner, is the Atlas Cleaning and Dyeing House, one of the first Black-owned businesses in Brockton.

Slavery was abolished in Massachusetts in 1783. Almost 40 years later in 1821, when North Parish became the town of North Bridgewater, the census recorded just 23 Blacks living in the community. By the turn of the 20th century, the Black population of Brockton had risen to 600, large enough to support the establishment of the two churches depicted here. The same period saw the opening of the first Black-owned business and the hiring of Brockton's first Black police officer. Some Blacks worked in the shoe factories but many were also gardeners, domestics or laborers. Today African Americans account for about 13% of Brockton's population.



Workers of the W. L. Douglas Shoe Company

This impressive workforce, photographed in the early 1900s, grew in just 30 years from the modest operation set up in 1876 by William Lewis Douglas with just five workers in one room. Beginning with an output of 48 pairs of shoes a day, it grew steadily – and dramatically – to become one of the two shoe-making giants in Brockton. In 1919, its daily output peaked at 20,000 pairs of shoes made by several thousand workers. The company's success was based on several factors, including the mass production of a fixed-price and inexpensive shoe for the working man and the use of advertising as early as 1881 to promote them ("I'm a pair of W. L. Douglas \$3 shoes"). The company was also the first shoe manufacturer to set up its own national chain of retail stores – at least 55 stores were in operation by 1900.

The other shoe-making giant in Brockton was the George E. Keith Company. Situated at the opposite end of town from the Douglas plant and set up at about the same time, the Keith factory produced "Walk-Over" shoes for men that were priced higher than those made by Douglas. Although the Douglas and Keith firms dominated the industrial landscape, scores of other companies also manufactured shoes in Brockton. By 1899, there were 91 shoe factories in operation, catering to increasingly diversified markets and increasingly sophisticated consumers.

Men and women from virtually all ethnic communities in Brockton worked in the industry at one time or another during its long dominance over the economy of the city (in 1915, 90% of all homeowners in Brockton worked in a shoe trade). Because the work was seasonal, workers were subject to periodic unemployment. Although labor relations in the shoe industry were relatively stable compared to those in the New England textile industry, Brockton did experience its share of labor unrest, including strikes and lockouts by employers (the Douglas company hired the attorney Louis Brandeis – later U.S. Supreme Court Justice – to handle a strike in its factory in 1908). Brockton shoe workers were organized into local unions along craft lines; situations, for example, were almost universally women. This meant that manufacturers had to negotiate with each craft union separately. The strike was aggravated by rising unemployment in the industry from 1920 on, which encouraged manufacturers to impose wage reductions on their workers, precipitating yet more conflict.

Douglas himself went on to become the Mayor of Brockton in 1890 and served as Democratic Governor of Massachusetts from 1905 through 1906. His experience as a large-scale employer in the shoe industry – where he had pioneered shorter working hours for his employees – prompted him to support legislation providing for a state arbitration board for labor disputes.

photograph courtesy of the Brockton Public Library



Shoeshine Boys' Strike

The Depression in Brockton, as elsewhere, pit worker against worker. Here shoeshine boys protest an edict issued by the City that confined shoeshine operations to commercial shoeshine parlors. The prohibition effectively stripped these boys of their livelihoods. The impact of the Depression on Brockton as a whole was dire. Between 1929 and 1932, shoe production dropped by more than a third. As businesses cut production or moved out, unemployment rose and labor-management disputes became much more common.

The Last Streetcar heading to the Brockton car barn at Belmont and West, July 10, 1937. Brockton had been the second community in the United States to introduce electric-powered streetcars. The advent of gasoline-powered buses and automobiles put them out of business.

photographs © Stanley Bauman



"The Arrival of the City", Brockton's Centennial Pageant, 1921

The highlight of Brockton's Centennial, celebrated June 12-18, 1921, was undoubtedly its historical pageant. Scripted by Suzanne Cary Gruver, the pageant re-enacted more than a dozen episodes of the city's history. It relied upon a cast of hundreds drawn from the local population (and hundreds more making costumes and props and providing musical accompaniments). Preceding chronologically, the episodes began with the purchase of land from Native Americans and then re-created the first town meeting, a quilting bee, the coming of the railroad and the visit of the Swedish singer, Christine Nilsson, among more than a dozen dramatic scenes. The scene reproduced here depicts the Arrival of the City (1881) who takes her place on the throne surrounded by her attendants, the Civic Virtues.



Rocky Marciano, February 20th, 1956
Brockton's favorite native son, Marciano was born Rocco Marchegiano in 1923, the son of a shoe worker. He first entered the ring professionally in 1948 and became heavyweight champion of the world when he defeated Jersey Joe Walcott in September 1952. Just a few months after this picture was taken, he retired undefeated after six title fights, having won 49 consecutive professional bouts.

photograph © Stanley Bauman



"Marvelous Marvin" Hagler, September 29, 1980.

Hagler received a hero's welcome in Brockton after becoming the undisputed World Middleweight Champion in September 1980. His successful boxing career, following that of Rocky Marciano, earned Brockton the title City of Champions. Although not a native son, he was managed for most of his career by Goody and Pat Petronelli and trained in their gym on Ward Street. Often regarded as one of the greatest middleweights of all time, Marvin Hagler defended his title 12 times until Sugar Ray Leonard defeated him in 1987 in what was considered a controversial 12-round decision.

photograph © Stanley Bauman

Brockton's History

Europeans first settled in the Brockton area in the middle of the 17th century, on land originally occupied by Wampanoag Indians and sold by them to Miles Standish. The nucleus of the present-day city became the North Parish of Bridgewater in 1738. Eighty-three years later, in 1821, it was upgraded from a parish to a town and called North Bridgewater. In 1874, after much deliberation, it was renamed once again, this time as Brockton, to distinguish it from its many Bridgewater neighbors. Seven years later, in 1881, it finally achieved the formal status of "city".

By the end of the 19th century, Brockton had certainly earned its urban designation. It was by then a thriving industrial city, firmly established as the "Men's Shoe Capital of the World." With a population of 40,000 in 1900, Brockton employed 6,000 workers in more than 100 separate shoe-manufacturing concerns. The rapidly expanding job markets and economic opportunities associated with a fast-growing industrial town encouraged new migration from all over. Irish, Swedish and African Americans established communities in Brockton in the 19th century. They were followed by Greeks, Italians, Lebanese, Lithuanians and French Canadians. By 1920, a quarter of all Brockton's residents were foreign-born. The distinctive mix of cultures and skills brought by these successive waves of newcomers has defined the special flavor of Brockton history and still resonates in its street and place names (Satucket, Campello, Italypan, etc). More recent arrivals – Cape Verdeans and Haitians – guarantee that the cultural life of the city will remain a dynamic one.

From a peak employment of about 30,000 in the 1920s, the shoe industry began a long and irreversible decline, radically changing the face of Brockton's employment profile. However, despite the loss of its manufacturing base over the course of the 20th century, the postwar rise of the automobile and the construction of a new highway system (especially Routes 128 and 24) placed Brockton residents and businesses within commuting distance of Boston and other regional labor markets. This has been a spur to further population growth. The current population of 94,304 represents more than a 50% increase over the past half century and is more than double the size of the population in 1900.

Today, Brockton's private service industries and its public institutions (providing government, education and health services) have taken on the role of primary employers once played by shoe manufacturers.

In choosing this path towards urban regeneration, Brockton's recent history may exemplify a trend among former industrial cities across the country, as they redesign themselves for the challenges of the 21st century.

BROCKTON'S HISTORICAL LANDMARKS

- 1821 The parish of North Bridgewater incorporated. The railroad arrives in town.
- 1846 Town of North Bridgewater re-named Brockton. The town organizes the first Brockton Fair.
- May 1874 Brockton Enterprise publishes its first newspaper.
- October 1874 Brockton Enterprise publishes its first newspaper.
- January 26, 1880 Brockton designated a city (population approx. 13,600). Ziba C. Keith elected first Mayor.
- 1881 Thomas Edison throws a switch to inaugurate Brockton's three-wire underground electricity distribution system, the first in the world.
- October 1, 1883 The city opens the first electrically-operated fire station in the United States.
- December 1884 James Edger becomes the first department store Santa Claus in the United States.
- September 1894 Brockton City Hall dedicated.
- 1896 Brockton becomes the first city in the country to abolish railroad grade crossings.
- 1900 Population of Brockton reaches 40,000.
- 1904 Brockton shoe magnate and former Mayor William L. Douglas elected Governor of Massachusetts (term 1905-6).
- March 20, 1905 Fire at the R. B. Grover & Co shoe factory leaves 58 dead, including 35 unidentified victims. Brockton Public Library dedicated.
- June 1913 Sacco and Vanzetti arrested in Brockton.
- May 5, 1920 Brockton Centennial celebrated.
- June 12-18, 1921 Rocky Marciano becomes the World Heavy Weight Boxing Champion.
- October 25, 1953 Veterans Administration Hospital dedicated. Brockton celebrates its Diamond Jubilee as first and only city in Plymouth County.
- September 27, 1980 Marvin Hagler becomes World Middle Weight Champion at Wembley Stadium, England.
- 2000 Population of Brockton is 94,304 (US Census).

This map and the Brockton History Trail was commissioned by The City of Brockton
John T. Yunits Jr., Mayor
Nancy Stack Savoie, City Planner

For further information on Brockton's history, visit the Brockton Historical Society Museums, 216 North Pearl Street, Rte 27, Exit 188 off Route 24 (Telephone 508.683.1039) or visit www.brocktonma.com

Brockton: From Rural Parish to Urban Center by Walter F. Carroll, published in 1988 is also a useful history of the city.

Thanks to local historians for offering research material and photographs: Stanley Bauman, Robert A. Kane, John Learnard, Howard B. Newton (City of Brockton Superintendent of Engineering), Lucia Shannon and Kathy Lussier (Brockton Public Library), Barbara Sousa and Willie Wilson Jr. (Brockton Public Schools) The History Trail Project also received support and guidance from Willie Wilson Jr., Ms Linda Shipp-King and Ms Cathy Jackson and Brockton High School students researching African American history in Brockton.

Research, text and map preparation by Yong Jo Kim, Ellen Leopold, Hubert Murray, HMAP, Cambridge, MA

City of Brockton HISTORY TRAIL



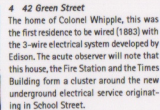
A Guide to the City Center showing buildings of architectural and historic interest with some highlights of Brockton's social history



CITY OF BROCKTON
Mayor
John T. Yunits Jr.
City Planner
Nancy Stack Savoie
February 2002



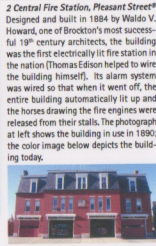
1 Hall Funeral Home, 81 Green Street
Built in 1884 by Edgar Everett Dean, a prominent local physician and politician, this was the first house designed by the architect Wesley Lyng Minor for a client in Brockton. Like the Sampson Funeral Home built two years later, the house reflects the exuberant Queen Anne architectural style with its complex mix of materials, roof gables, bay windows, and its use of stained glass and terra cotta.



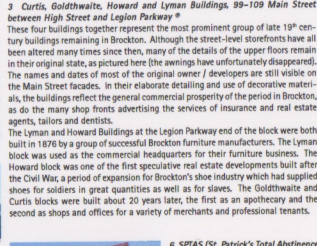
4 42 Green Street
The home of Colonel Whipple, this was the first residence to be wired (1883) with the 3-wire electrical system developed by Edison. The acute observer will note that this house, the Fire Station and the Times Building form a cluster around the new underground electrical service originating in School Street.



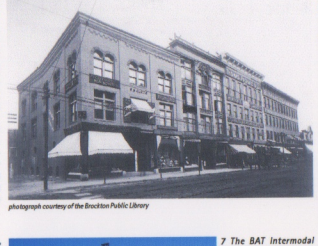
5 The Times Building, corner of Pleasant and Main Streets
Built in 1897 and wired with Edison's new 3-wire system, along with adjacent buildings on Main and Pleasant. The building once housed the Times, a newspaper founded by one of the captains of Brockton's shoe industry, W. L. Douglas. In 1934, the Times merged with the Enterprise and moved out of the building.



2 Central Fire Station, Pleasant Street
Designed and built in 1884 by Waldo V. Howard, one of Brockton's most successful 19th century architects, the building was the first electrically lit fire station in the nation (Thomas Edison helped to wire the building himself). Its alarm system was wired so that if it went off, the entire building automatically lit up and the horses drawing the fire engines were released from their stalls. The Goldthwaite and Curtis blocks were built about 20 years later, the first as an apothecary and the second as shops and offices for a variety of merchants and professional tenants.



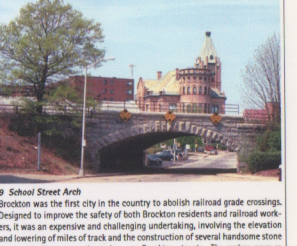
3 Curtis, Goldthwaite, Howard and Lyman Buildings, 99-109 Main Street between High Street and Legion Parkway
These four buildings together represent the most prominent group of late 19th century buildings remaining in Brockton. Although the street-level storefronts have all been altered many times since then, many of the details of the upper floors remain in their original state, as pictured here (the awnings have unfortunately disappeared). The names and dates of most of the original owners' developers are still visible on the Main Street facades. In their elaborate detailing and use of decorative materials, the buildings reflect the general commercial prosperity of the period in Brockton, as do the many shop fronts advertising the services of insurance and real estate agents, tailors and dentists. The Lyman and Howard Buildings at the Legion Parkway end of the block were both built in 1876 by a group of successful Brockton furniture manufacturers. The Lyman block was used as the commercial headquarters for their furniture business. The Howard block was one of the first speculative real estate developments built after the Civil War, a period of expansion for Brockton's shoe industry which had supplied shoes for soldiers in great quantities as well as for slaves. The Goldthwaite and Curtis blocks were built about 20 years later, the first as an apothecary and the second as shops and offices for a variety of merchants and professional tenants.



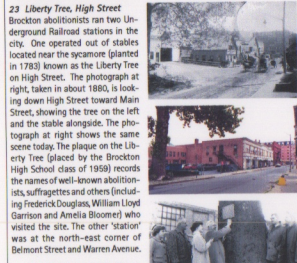
7 The BAT Intermodal Center
The BAT station was completed in 1996 as part of re-establishing the Old Colony Line commuter rail link to Brockton's South Station. The Police Station across the street occupies the site of the original train station.



8 Brockton City Hall
Designed by the architect Wesley Lyng Minor and opened in 1894, this distinctive architectural landmark embodies the prosperity of Brockton at that time. Sitting on a generous triangular site and built of buff brick and Deer Island granite, the building's Romanesque grandeur is visible from many perspectives in the downtown area. The building boasts extraordinary moldings in its window and roof designs and is enriched with imaginative brownstone volutes and terra-cotta panels. A year after the building was opened, the local artist Francis Mortimer Lamb was commissioned to paint a series of Civil War scenes inside it. These paintings remain in place today.



9 School Street Arch
Brockton was the first city in the country to abolish railroad grade crossings. Designed to improve the safety of both Brockton residents and railroad workers, it was an expensive and challenging undertaking, involving the arduous and lowering of miles of track and the construction of several handsome stone viaducts built to carry the trains over Brockton streets. The arches were so well designed and built they are still in excellent condition over one hundred years later.



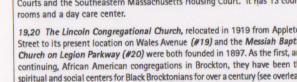
23 Liberty Tree, High Street
Brockton abolitionists ran two Underground Railroad stations in the city. One operated out of stables located near the scycamore (planted in 1783) known as the Liberty Tree on High Street. The photograph at right, taken in about 1880, is looking down High Street toward Main Street, showing the tree on the left and the stable adjacent. The photograph at right shows the same scene today. The plaque on the Liberty Tree (placed by the Brockton High School class of 1959) records the names of well-known abolitionists, suffragettes and others (including Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and Amelia Bloomer) who visited the site. The other 'station' was at the north-east corner of Belmont Street and Warren Avenue.



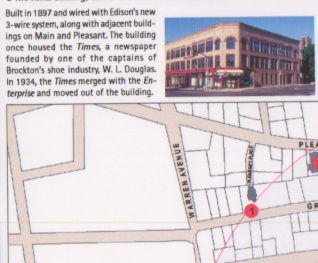
22 The Hotel Grayson
Of the more than 25 hotels operating in Brockton over the period 1870-1920, the Hotel Grayson is the only one remaining in its original use. Designed to accommodate wealthy shoe manufacturers visiting from outside the area, it incorporated design features associated with the opulence of turn-of-the-century gentlemen's clubs. The hotel is said to have been named for David Grayson, social reformer and author of 'Adventures in Contentment'. Today, the building is a residential hotel for Brockton's service workers.



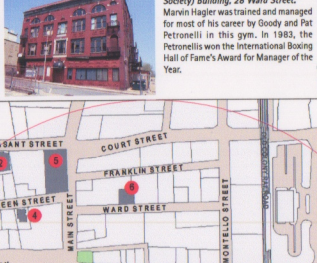
21 District Court House, 215 Main Street
Located on the site of the old Colonial Theater and Edgar's Department Store (home of the first store Santa Claus in December 1890), the new courthouse was opened in August 2000. The design is reminiscent of the old Brockton Police Station, built in the 1890s, where in 1920 the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested and charged with murder. The new four-story building houses the Brockton District Court, the Plymouth County Probate and Juvenile Courts and the Southeastern Massachusetts Housing Court. It has 13 courtrooms and a day care center.



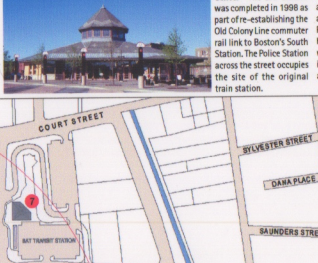
18,20 The Lincoln Congregational Church, relocated in 1919 from Appleton Street to its present location on White Avenue
1819 and the Messiah Baptist Church on Legion Parkway (#20) were both founded in 1887. As the first, and continuing, African American congregations in Brockton, they have been the spiritual and social centers for Black Brocktonians for over a century (see overview).



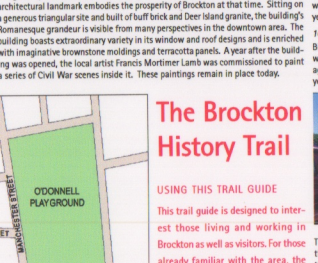
6 SP/AS (St. Patrick's Total Abstinence Society) Building, 28 Ward Street
Marvin Hagler was trained and managed for most of his career by Goody and Pat Petronelli in this gym. In 1983, the Petronellis won the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Award for Manager of the Year.



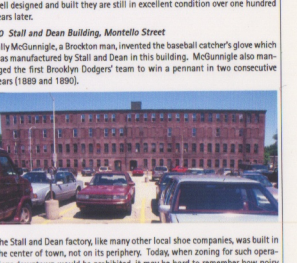
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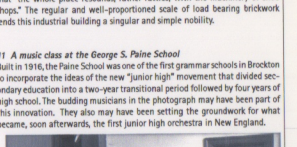
10 Stoll and Dean Building, Montello Street
Billy McLaughlin, a Brockton man, invented the baseball catcher's glove which was manufactured by Stoll and Dean in this building. McLaughlin also managed the first Brooklyn Dodgers' team to win a pennant in two consecutive years (1889 and 1890).



The Brockton History Trail

USING THIS TRAIL GUIDE

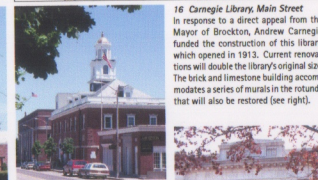
This trail guide is designed to interest those living and working in Brockton as well as visitors. For those already familiar with the area, the guide may serve as a reminder of some of the city's more remarkable achievements. For newcomers, it may serve as an introduction to the city center, its distinguished architecture and the people and events that have shaped its recent history. This side of the guide focuses on the history of Brockton associated with architectural landmarks and other buildings in the downtown area. The reverse side ranges more widely geographically and historically. On both sides the guide is intended as a stimulus for further research and for a greater appreciation of the city that was once the center of a world industry in shoes, the center of a world industry in shoes, the home of sports champions. As the City of Brockton prepares for the future in a competitive world, it is hoped that this guide will prompt some thoughts on the men and women who built it and the talents and energy they brought to the job that contributed so much to their, and the city's, success.



11 A music class at the George S. Paine School
Built in 1916, the Paine School was one of the first grammar schools in Brockton to incorporate the ideas of the new 'Junior high' movement that divided secondary education into a two-year transitional period followed by four years of high school. The building musicians in the photograph above, who have been part of this innovation. They also may have been setting the groundwork for what became, soon afterwards, the first junior high orchestra in New England.



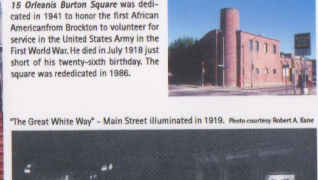
The Paine School served the children of Brockton until 1995 when the building became the Juvenile Court. Five years later, it underwent yet another transformation, re-opening, in the fall of 2000, as Brockton's Adult Learning Center. Part of the public school system, the Center currently offers free classes in literacy, English language and preparation for the G.E.D.



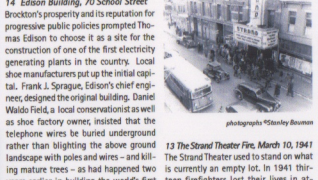
16 Carnegie Library, 70 School Street
Brockton's prosperity and its reputation for progressive public policies prompted Thomas Edison to choose it as a site for the construction of one of the first electrically generating plants in the country. Local shoe manufacturers put up the initial capital. Frank J. Sprague, Edison's chief engineer, designed the original building. Daniel Waldo Field, a local conservationist as well as shoe factory owner, insisted that the telephone wires be buried underground rather than blighting the above ground landscape with poles and wires - and killing mature trees - as had happened two years earlier in building the wool's first power plant in New York City. On October 1, 1883, Edison threw the main switch of the new plant, bringing incandescent three-wire underground lighting for the first time from a central plant to a downtown commercial district. Just a year later, Brockton's City Theatre was the first in the United States to be lit by electricity generated off the premises. Similarly, the home of Colonel Whipple at #42 Green Street (photo 4) was the first private residence in the U.S. to be illuminated by power from a central generating plant.



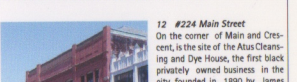
WPA Mural: The History of Books and Printing
This is one of the murals in the Brockton Carnegie Library completed by Fritz Kugler in 1941 under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration. Painted on the four walls of a large skylit upper lobby, the murals depict the history of books and printing, from the manuscripts of the ancient world to 20th-century printing methods. After the war - and another mural he created for the police station in Falmouth - Kugler went on to a distinguished career at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, putting his artistic skill to use in mapping the wild behavior of the Gulf Stream.



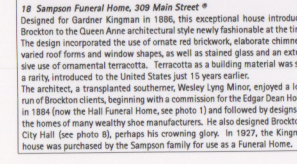
'The Great White Way' - Main Street, illuminated in 1919. Photo courtesy Robert A. Kane



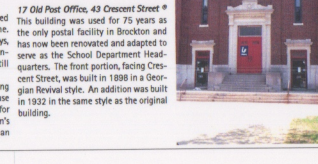
13 The Strand Theater Fire, March 10, 1941
The Strand Theater used to stand on what is currently an empty lot. In 1841 three firefighters lost their lives in attempting to put out a fire at what was then the oldest theatre in Brockton. When a roof collapsed, the firemen below were trapped on the second balcony and died. A memorial commemorating this loss stands in City Hall.



12 #224 Main Street
On the corner of Main and Crescent, is the site of the Atlas Cleaning and Dye House, the first brick privately owned business in the city, founded in 1880 by James Atlas. The building is visible in the old photograph below, on the right, beyond the 'Standard Clothing's' sign and opposite Edgar's Department Store, now the Courthouse (see photo 16). Notice also how awnings were used to protect windows from the westerly sun. The photo to the left shows the 'Standard Clothing's' building today.



18 Sampson Funeral Home, 309 Main Street
Designed for Gardner Kingman in 1886, this exceptional house introduced Brockton to the Queen Anne architectural style newly fashionable at the time. The design incorporated the use of ornate red brickwork, elaborate chimneys, varied roof forms and window shapes, as well as stained glass and an extensive use of ornamental terra-cotta. Terra-cotta as a building material was still a rarity, introduced to the United States just 15 years earlier. The architect, a transplanted southerner, Wesley Lyng Minor, enjoyed a long run of Brockton clients, beginning with a commission for the Edgar Dean House in 1884 (now the Hall Funeral Home, see photo 1) and followed by designs for the homes of many wealthy shoe manufacturers. He also designed Brockton's City Hall (see photo 8), perhaps his crowning glory. In 1927, the Kingman house was purchased by the Sampson family for use as a Funeral Home.



17 Old Post Office, 49 Crescent Street
This building was used for 75 years as the only postal facility in Brockton and has now been renovated and adapted to serve as the School Department Headquarters. The front portion, facing Crescent Street, was built in 1888 in a Georgian Revival style. An addition was built in 1932 in the same style as the original building.