



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

Guide to the Street Lighting History Collection

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SERIES LIST

[Biographical/Historical note](#)

[Series I: Administrative](#)

[Scope and Contents note](#)

[Series II: Historical](#)

[Series III: Photographs](#)

Biographical/Historical note

Prior to 1828, the City used oil lamps to light Boston's streets. In 1828, the Boston Gas Company installed a coal gas lamp in Haymarket Square. This lamp was the first gas lamp in the city and served as a demonstration lamp. Six years later, the city installed the first gas street lamp in the Faneuil Hall area.

In 1882, the city installed the first electric street lamps in Scollay square. Shortly after, during the 1890s, the city began to convert oil lamps to gas lamps. These converted lamps used naphtha gas, a derivative of gasoline.

In 1909, the city began installing tungsten electric lamps. Three years later, in 1912, tungsten electric lamps began to replace existing naphtha lamps. By 1913, all gas lamps in Boston proper had been converted to electric lamps. The following year, all lamps in lower Roxbury were converted to electric lamps.

Although the city used electric lamps in Boston Proper and areas of Roxbury, it continued to use gas lamps in its residential districts. The last gas lamps were installed in residential districts in 1948. During the 1940s, mercury

vapor electric lamps were also installed on many major Boston streets.

During the first half of the 20th century, outside vendors maintained the city's gas lamps, but in 1958, the City took over gas lamp maintenance. Four years later, the city began to change electric lamps in historic neighborhoods back to gas lamps. Electric to gas changeovers continued into the 1990s.

By the 1960s, Boston was actively engaged in urban renewal. As streets in areas such as Roxbury underwent reconstruction, the number of city-owned street lights increased. In addition, city-owned street lights increased through the early 1980s. During this period, the city's Street Lighting Division grew rapidly as the older and more expensive Boston Edison lighting system was replaced by a system owned and designed by the City.

Street light installations continued through the 1990s. During the 1990s, the city also rebuilt some street lamps installed in the 1970s, often replacing cobra head style lights with period style designs.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the city continued to reconstruct major streets. As a result, the number of city-owned street lights continued to increase. Additionally, in 2002, the city bought 23,000 street lights from Boston Edison. By 2010, the city owned approximately 67,000 street lights.

Compiled using material from the Public Works Street Lighting Timeline
(<http://www.cityofboston.gov/publicworks/lighting/history.asp>)

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Contents note

This collection documents the activities of the Boston Public Works Department's Street Lighting Division. Materials consist primarily of administrative records including contracts, logs, repair orders, lists of lamps, and correspondence. Records also include an information file on street lighting in general, photographs of lamps in Boston and surrounding towns, a scrapbook, and lamp drawings and schematics.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

Series I: Administrative

Box

- 1 Abandoned gas lamps, 1953-1954
- 1 Burning and rate schedule, 1969

Drawer

- 2/A/046 City Planning Board: Tax exempt property survey, South End, 1934 March

Box

- 1 Contracts, 1924-1951 [gaps]
- 1 Contracts: Repairs, 1953-1957
- Correspondence, 1940-1972

Box

- 1 American Service Company: Plastic globes, 1947-1949
- 1 General, 1971-1972
- 1 Installation orders, 1940-1942
- 2 Letters to gas company, 1936-1949, 1952-1954, 1958-1961

Financial, 1952-1958

Box
 2 Bills from American Service Company, 1952-1958
 2 Cost of lamps, 2 April 1952
 2 Gas lighting card, undated
 2 Inventories, 1963
 Volume
 2 Lamp locations, 1942-1981
 Box
 3 Lamps in service by district, 1928-1956
 3 Lighters returns, 1941-1957
Orders to Boston Edison, 1966-1989
 Box
 5 1965-1967
 5 1968-1970
 5 1971-1973
 5 1974-1979
 5 1979-1989
 3 Personnel cards, 1902-1914
 Drawer
 2/A/046 Proposed street lamp sketch by Henry Wolfers Inc, 1956 March 16
 Box
 3 Removals, 1956, 1959-1960, 1964-1966, 1968-1971
 3 Removal of lamp tops for record and billing only, 1959
Reports, 1929-1955
 Box
 3 Street lighting survey, 1929 December
 3 Lighting service, 1955
 3 Service orders for repairs, 1982-1995
 5 Small lamps: numerical list
 3 South End district, 1941-1963
 Drawer
 2/A/046 Specifications and drawings, 1910-1973
 Box
 3
 Box
 3 Standards and specifications, 1948-1974
 4 West Brookline Street lamp petition, 1978 July 27

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series II: Historical

Records kept for background information

Box

4	Newsclippings, ca. 1950-2000
4	Research file, 1998-2000
4	Types of gas lamps, ca. 1938
Volume	
1	Scrapbook

[Return to the Series List](#)

Series III: Photographs

These photographs can be viewed online at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cityofbostonarchives/sets/72157629278837776/>

5	West side of Grove Street from Revere to Phillips Street, #4019, 1905 May 8
5	Northerly side of Revere Street from West Cedar to Grove Street, circa 1905-1910
5	Central Square, South side of Massachusetts Avenue, #4046, 1907 March 5
5	Unidentified avenue from Phillips Street, circa 1905-1913
5	Huntington Avenue, circa 1913
5	Huntington Avenue at Copley Square, circa 1913
5	176 Marlborough Street, circa 1922
5	#1538, circa 1915-1930
5	Dunlow Street at rear of Norfolk House carhouse, Roxbury, #3722, circa 1915-1930
5	#11083, circa 1915-1930
5	#13481, circa 1915-1930
5	Meridian Street at Decatur Street, East Boston, #14603, circa 1915-1930
5	#14650, circa 1915-1930
5	#14831, circa 1915-1930
5	#15010, circa 1915-1930
5	#15483, circa 1915-1930
5	#17025, circa 1915-1930
5	#18303, circa 1915-1930
5	#18343, circa 1915-1918
5	#18585, ca.1915-1930
5	#18727, circa 1915-1930
5	#19457, circa 1915-1930
5	#19465, circa 1915-1930
5	#19466, circa 1915-1930
5	#19587, circa 1915-1930
5	Allston Railroad Station, Allston, #19895, circa 1915-1930
5	Allston/Brighton, #20791, circa 1915-1930
5	Allston/Brighton, #20796, circa 1915-1930
5	#21087, circa 1915-1930
5	#22133, circa 1915-1930
5	#22135, circa 1915-1930
5	#22304, circa 1915-1930

5 #23300, circa 1915-1930
 5 Washington Street, West Roxbury, #23305, circa 1915-1930
 5 Washington Street, West Roxbury, #23310, circa 1915-1930
 5 #23316, circa 1915-1930
 5 #23636, circa 1915-1930
 5 Wilton Street, Brighton, #23985, circa 1915-1930
 5 #23990, ca.1915-1930
 5 #25910, circa 1915-1930
 5 Central Square, East Boston, #24010, circa 1915-1930
 5 #24433, circa 1915-1930
 5 #24434, circa 1915-1930
 5 #24647, circa 1915-1930
 5 #26719, circa 1915-1930
 5 #26742, circa 1915-1930
 5 Bennington Street, East Boston, #26815, circa 1915-1930
 5 Bennington Street, East Boston, #26817, circa 1915-1930
 5 Wilton Street, Brighton, #27373, circa 1915-1930
 5 Wilton Street, Brighton, #27374, circa 1915-1930
 5 #27065, circa 1915-1930
 5 #27399, circa 1915-1930
 5 #28149, circa 1915-1930
 5 #28710, circa 1915-1930
 5 #29595, circa 1915-1930
 5 #30334, circa 1915-1930
 5 #31103, circa 1915-1930
 5 #33462, circa 1915-1930
 5 London Street, East Boston, #33219, circa 1915-1930
 5 #33346, circa 1915-1930
 5 #33352, circa 1915-1930
 5 #33361, circa 1915-1930
 5 #33543, circa 1915-1930
 5 Bennett Street, Brighton, #34747
 5 #39199, ca.1915-1915
 5 #39449, circa 1915-1930
 5 H Street, South Boston, #39653, ca.1915-1930
 5 #39711, circa 1915-1930
 5 Beech Street, West Roxbury, #3243-3, 1956 May 22
 5 #1826-2, circa1956
 5 Wordsworth Street, East Boston, #3243, 1956 May 22
 5 Wordsworth Street, East Boston, circa 1956
 5 Holden Street, Dorchester, #1296-2, circa1956
 5 Unidentified lamp, circa1963-1964
 5 Pilgrim Road, Roxbury, Haverhill Iron Works pole, 1963 August 13
 5 Hancock Street, Dorchester, Boston type pole with shield, 1963 August 13

- 5 #4 Windermere Road, rear, Dorchester, round type pole, 1963 August 13
- 5 Water Street, Jamaica Plain, American Lighting Company, Baltimore type pole, 1963 August 13
- 5 Pulaski Avenue, alley rear W. 3rd Street, South Boston, Welsbach no. 40 type pole, 1963 August 13
- 5 Wellesley Park, Dorchester, 1963 August 17
- 5 Lyndeboro Street at Essex Street, Charlestown, Pennsylvania Globe Gas Light Company, Philadelphia type pole, 1963 August 26
- 5 #7 Bolton Place, Charlestown, Newton type pole, 1963 August 26
- 5 #5 Amory Street, Charlestown Brackett light with reflector, 1963 August 26
- 5 Opposite #78 Washington Street, Charlestown, Brooklyn type pole, 1963 August 26
- 5 Lawrence Avenue, rear #33 Lawrence Street, Charlestown, 1963 August 26
- 5 Essex Street, Charlestown, Bracket type light with shield, 1963 August 26
- 5 Sever Street, Worcester, New York type post, 1964 September 2
- 5 #36 Monmouth Street, East Boston, 1964 September 25
- 5 Unidentified street lamp, ca.1963-1964
- 5 Unidentified street lamp, ca.1963-1964
- 5 Unidentified street lamp, ca.1963-1964
- 5 #3926, ca.1963-1964
- 5 Unidentified street lamp, ca. 1963-1964
- 5 Unidentified street lamp, ca.1963-1964
- 5 #T1054-5, ca.1963-1964
- 5 Unidentified street lamp, ca.1963-1964
- 5 #79 Charles Street, 1975 August 16
- 5 Unidentified street lamp, circa 1970s
- 5 Unidentified lamps, circa 2003

[Return to the Series List](#)