

Preserving History, Brick by Brick

Dorchester's Edward Huebener Turned His Turn-of-the-Century Painted Collection into a Local Legacy

By Anthony M. Sammarco

Dorchester resident Edward A. Huebener not only collected bricks and had various artists a portrait of the house from which they came, but he was also an authority on each house. He could produce a long list of interesting facts that made these lumps of baked clay come to life . . . if even for just the moment.

Huebener admitted few to his turn-of-the-century inner sanctum, the Dorchester workshop where the

"Madam, may I have a brick from the chimney of this house?"

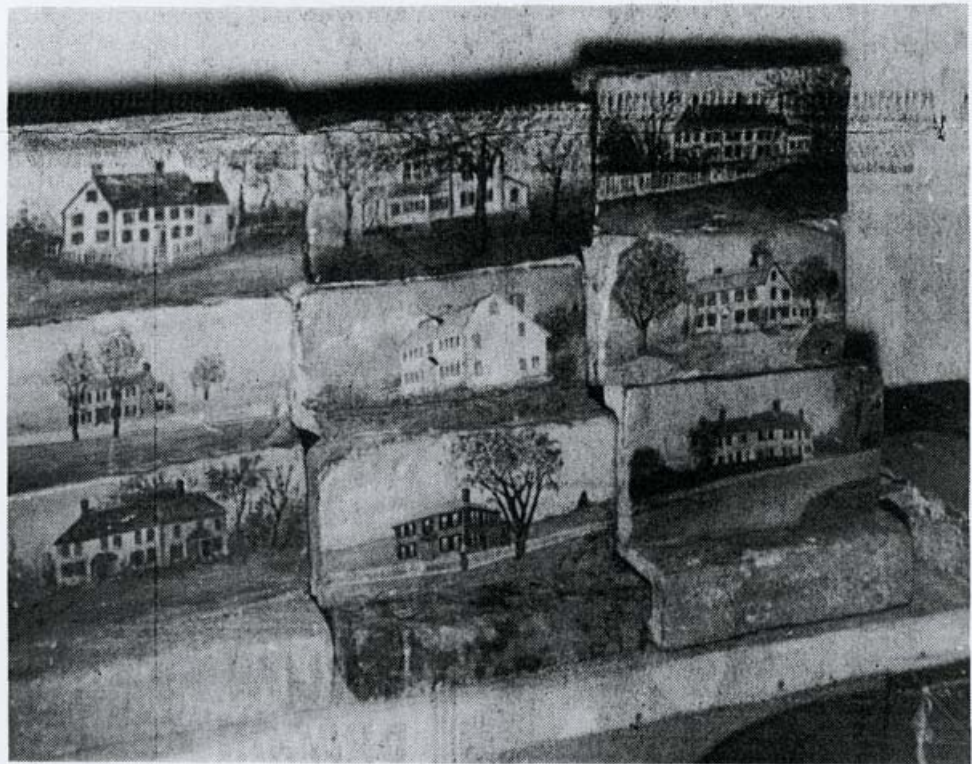
bricks were kept and displayed on tabletops. His home nearby, at 80 Parkman Street, was also full of curiosities and many of the bricks which overflowed from his shop.

The Edward A. Huebener Brick Collection represents not just a unique depiction of historic Dorchester houses, but is also a direct socio-economic result of the annexation of Dorchester to the City of Boston in 1870.

Settled in 1630, Dorchester had

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both farming and commercial enterprises for well over 200 years before the annexation. The fertile lands, commercial fisheries and water power afforded by the Neponset



Antique bricks collected nearly 100 years ago by Dorchester native Edward Huebener are delicately painted with replicas of the early Dorchester homes they once supported.

River nurtured diverse businesses, many of them quite profitable ventures.

Annexation was the culmination of many years of debate. The composition of the town of Dorchester had been changing for many years, with businessmen of wealth

in Boston purchasing large tracts of farmland for speculation.

The street-grid laid out by local architect Luther Briggs, Jr. in 1840 was to be named Harrison Square in honor of the late President of the United States, William Henry Harrison. This fashionable area at-

tracted many wealthy newcomers, who commuted into town daily on the Old Colony Railroad.

As a result, the annexation was passed by a slight majority. The official date the town of Dorchester ceased to exist was January 4, 1870.

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Huebener (1851-1936), born just before, was understandably affected by the changes that ensued. Undoubtedly, he saw many of the old estates being demolished for subdivisions. The story of his mother asking for a brick to stop the door from slamming is a charming explanation for his brick collecting, but the collection is remarkable in scope and diversity.

Born in the former "Turks Head Tavern" on Meeting House Hill, Huebener's interest may have been nurtured by the charms afforded by the old building in which he was born. The tavern was built by the Rev. John Danforth in 1680, and the noted authoress of *The Lamplighter*, Miss Maria Cummins, lived here with her father, Judge Cummins, in the nineteenth century.

The Huebeners later moved to Freeport Street at Glover's Corner (known during the late eighteenth century as "Sodom and Gomorrah.") This too was an old house, originally owned by the Withington family. It was in this house that the now famous request of Mrs. Huebener was heard again... "Bring some bricks to keep the doors from slamming!"

As a young man, Huebener courted, then married Miss Amanda A. Christmas of Brighton. Their wedding took place on September 4,

1884 at All Saints Episcopal Church, Ashmont. They had one child, Miss Elizabeth A. Huebener, who shared

"I only sold the sign to you because I wanted your signature."

her father's obvious love of local history.

Huebener was apprenticed as an upholsterer and a woodcarver to F. Schlotterback, and by 1890 had a "hospital" for antiques in his shop on Adams Street, King Square, Dorchester.

He was also well-known for his steam cleaning techniques on carpets, and in the production of reproduction tabernacle mirrors.

The famous brick collector's reputation as a "lover of things old" endeared him to those who possessed relics from Dorchester's history. Huebener secured the ersatz boots of Captain Roger Clapp when Deacon Ebenezer Clapp died, and a copper wash basin from Gertrude Capen Whitney, which was reputed to have been brought to Dorchester on the Mary & John.

His interest was sincere, and his collection of hand-painted bricks increased in both size and scope as he uttered the words, "Madam, may I have a brick from the chimney of this house?"

In his later years, Huebener's eccentric personality intensified. According to one well-respected resident of this venerable town, he not only made his own coffin of well-seasoned hardwood, but occasionally slept in it. It is interesting and unusual that he slept in a coffin, especially since his family opted after his death to cremate his remains at the Forest Hills Crematorium.

The great Henry Ford came to Dorchester because of one of Huebener's eccentricities. Ford was restoring the Wayside Inn in

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Sudbury, but Huebener had possession of the ancient tavern's sign. Ford, when he learned this, arrived in his chauffeur-driven car at Parkman Street, and convinced Huebener to sell the sign, which he did for a check for one cent.

After many months, Ford was perplexed at the fact that his check

for one cent had not been cashed. He again called upon Huebener to ascertain the meaning of this oversight, and the reply was, "I only sold

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the sign to you because I wanted your signature." What resulted was a cordial friendship. A correspondence of an historic nature continued between Dorchester and Dearborn, Michigan for many years.

Eccentricities aside, Huebener remains a well-respected antiquarian and historian. He was a vice president of the Bay State Historical League, a director of the Dorchester Historical Society and a contributing member of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). His death marked the passing of an era, because many historical details and facts about Dorchester went with him.

This article was submitted by Dorchester lecturer and historian Anthony M. Sammarco