

1-10-97



Taken in the winter of 1949, this photograph documents a corner in Dorchester that has changed greatly in the last five decades.

Former “Dorchester Turnpike” had rich, vibrant history

by Anthony Mitchell Sammarco

Dorchester is a busy thoroughfare that connects South Boston and Milton in a fairly smooth, even road. Laid out in 1804 as “Dorchester Turnpike”, it was a toll road in which one paid a fare per the weight of ones cart. The toll booth was located at the corner of Adams Street and Dorchester Avenue, known as Dalrymple Junction after the Dalrymples who lived in a small house Where the Lenane Building now is and where they weighed delivery carts.

As the turnpike was a toll road, and the side streets (Adams and Washington Streets) were free roads, the Dorchester Turnpike went bankrupt, as the the frugal Dorchesterites eschewed the turnpike for the free roads. In 1854, the turnpike was renamed Dorchester Avenue and became a free road. Horse drawn streetcars ran the length of the avenue, allowing residents to either commute to Boston for business or shopping. Though the Avenue once had some of the most substantial houses in Dorchester, it became almost entirely commercial by World War I.

Fields Corner, the former Dalrymple Junction, was named for Isaac and Enos Field who kept a general store on the avenue. It was a common practice to name the corner after the proprietor of the general store and thus Fields, Glovers, and Bakers (now Codman Square) Corners were so named.

BY THE FIRST DECADE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, Dorchester had become a far different town due to its annexation to Boston. From a population of eight thousand in 1870, it had increased to over one hundred thousand in three decades. The proximity of Boston meant that new residents were moving to Dorchester and the Streetcar lines proved insufficient. The Red line ended at Andrew Square in South Boston and residents took streetcars to their neighborhoods in Dorchester until 1927 when the Red Line was extended to Ashmont. With the new stops Columbia (now JFK/U. Mass), Savin Hill, Fields Corner Shawmut and Ashmont, further development took place.

In the accompanying Photograph, a service car heads south on Dorchester Avenue in 1949. At the corner of Park Street, which was laid out in 1845, a commercial block can be seen behind the car. With Bishop Drug store on the first floor and apartments above. On the right is the Park Cinema, one of Dorchester’s, many “movie places”. The marquee states that on Saturday evening, a drawing of \$150.00 in cash would be awarded, a great attraction to go to the movies! These movie houses, among them the Adams, Codman, and Milton, offered dinnerware on specific evenings to further induce attendance.

Anthony Mitchell Sammarco's award winning columns are a regular feature of Dorchester Community News.