



## South Cove/Chinatown Walk

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 = MBTA stop



# Chinatown/South Cove Walk

## “Action for Social and Economic Justice”

The Chinatown/South Cove Walk starts at the Visitor Center on Boston Common, winds through Chinatown, and ends at Park Square.

It presents a wide range of women’s activities and organizations working for social change and economic justice. The focus is on immigrant groups, most recently Chinese.

The walk also includes a women’s settlement house serving an earlier immigrant population, and the international programs of a Catholic sisterhood.

The South Cove area, originally the South Cove of Boston Harbor, was filled in between 1833-39. Beach Street takes its name from its former location along the edge of the harbor. Although the Chinese community began arriving in the mid-nineteenth century, large numbers of women were not allowed until the liberalization of immigration laws in the mid-twentieth century.

The people of the Chinese community give the area its special spirit, along with its architecture, murals, restaurants, groceries, and shops.

**Time:** 1 1/2 hours

**Begins:** Visitor Welcome Center, Boston Common

**Directions:** From the Visitor Center, cross Tremont Street, turn down West Street.

### C1: Elizabeth Peabody



#### Book Shop

13-15 West Street

The Book Shop of **Elizabeth Peabody** (1804-94) is best known as the location of the 1839-44 Conversations led by **Margaret Fuller** (1810-50) which helped crystallize New England Transcendentalism, a movement encouraging the perfection of each individual. A regular participant in these Conversations was philosopher and activist **Ednah Dow Littlehale Cheney** (1824-1904) who, at age 16, was the youngest participant (see also BBW8). Fuller



Margaret Fuller



*“We only ask of men to remove arbitrary barriers....But if you ask me what offices they may fill, I reply — any. I do not care what case you put; let them be sea captains if you will. I do not doubt there are women well fitted for such an office.” —Margaret Fuller, 1845*

received an intense classical education from her father and became known as an intellectual prodigy. Working with Ralph Waldo Emerson and others, she edited the transcendentalist journal *The Dial* and was the first woman journalist for the *New York Tribune*. Her essay *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is an American feminist classic.

**Elizabeth Peabody**, who was also a Transcendentalist, founded American kindergartens (see B5) and here at the Book Shop became the first woman publisher in Boston. Her younger sisters were each married in the family parlor behind the Book Shop. **Sophia Peabody** (1809-71), an artist, married author **Nathaniel Hawthorne**, and **Mary Peabody** (1806-87), an educator, married **Horace Mann**, considered to be the father of American public education.

## C2: Massachusetts Bar Association

*20 West Street*

The first woman member of the Massachusetts Bar Association was **Mary A. Mahan** of West Roxbury, who was admitted in 1913. Many women lawyers in Boston attended Portia School of Law, established in 1908 (see B4). After Mahan was admitted along with with thirty-four men, a member spoke up saying he hoped her admission would “not interfere with our banquets and prevent smoking,” but, he added, showing his pride in their action, “the question of women members has been brought before the American Bar Association and the members have dodged it.”

*Directions: Turn right on Washington Street.*



Women telephone operators on strike in 1919

## C3: Sarah Caldwell and the Boston Opera House

*539 Washington Street*

As founder of The Opera Company, **Sarah Caldwell** (1924-2006) staged and conducted full-fledged performances of operas at various venues in Boston from 1957 to 1991. In 1980 the Opera Company acquired The Opera House. With her compelling and demanding personality, Caldwell charted a new course for opera in America. She had a special talent for producing flamboyant theatrical effects and with her adventurous spirit she embraced the whole spectrum of operatic possibilities. In 1976 she became the first woman to conduct at the Metropolitan Opera House. She received thirty-five honorary degrees and in 1997 the National Medal of the Arts (see SE32).

*Directions: Turn left on Avenue de Lafayette and right on Harrison Avenue Extension to Harrison Avenue.*

## C4: Telephone Exchange

*2-8 Harrison Avenue and Oxford Place*

A successful and nonviolent strike of 8,000 women telephone operators in April 1919, led by **Julia O'Connor [Parker]** (1890-1972), paralyzed telephone service in five New England states for six days. This building is an expansion of the Oxford





A woman telephone operator at new England Telephone, ca. 1926

Street exchange where O'Connor worked. Switchboard operators, who were mostly young, single Irish-American women, were expected to work at breakneck speed often on split shifts. They were punished with detention as if they were still in high school. Supported by the Women's Trade Union League, O'Connor and her team negotiated a settlement that included a \$3 to \$4 weekly raise (see C16). Starting in 1939, she worked for eighteen years as an organizer for the AFL.

**C5: International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), present office of UNITE**

*31 Harrison Avenue*

Although only a few clothing factories still operate in this area, Harrison and Kneeland streets were once the center of the New England ready-made clothing industry. The WPA Federal Writers' Guide said that on "warm days the hum of hundreds of sewing machines can be heard through the open windows." In 1936, the winter after the National Labor Relations Act gave workers the right to organize, hundreds of women garment workers joined a strike supported by the ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers that lasted two months. In April they won a closed shop, a forty-hour week (instead

of fifty-two hours), and an increased minimum wage. Today UNITE represents the Union of Needle Industrial and Textile Employees.

*Directions: Turn left on Beach Street. Cross Beach Street to Tyler Street. South and east of Beach Street was South Cove, a tidal flat until the 1830s.*



Chew Shee Chin

**C6: New England Chinese Women's Association**

*2 Tyler Street*

The New England Chinese Women's Association was founded in 1942 by **Chew Shee Chin** (1899-1985) and other Boston Chinese women in response to **Madame Chiang Kai Shek's** appeal for China relief during World War II. The association continues to serve the Boston Chinese community as a networking and social service organization. Chew Shee Chin was one of the first Chinese-American women to work in Boston's garment industry (see C5).

**C7: Phillis Wheatley Landing Place**



*Beach and Tyler Streets*

**Phillis Wheatley** (ca. 1753-84), the first published African American woman poet

in America, landed while still a small child in 1761 in the slave ship *Phillis* at Avery's Wharf located near the present position of Tyler Street. She was purchased at auction by the Wheatley family. Her mistress, **Suzannah Wheatley** (d. 1774) became her mentor (see also D21). Phillis Wheatley is one of three women chosen to be portrayed in the Boston Women's Memorial (see BBW23).

*Directions: Cross to Beach Street to Oxford Place. Take an immediate left into the vest pocket park to view the four-story mural, "Travellers in an Autumn Landscape," painted by Wang Yun (1652-1735) with ink on silk and owned by the Museum of Fine Arts. This Chinatown Heritage Mural was created by Wen-ti Tsen and Yuon Zuo. Return to Beach Street and turn left. Walk through the arch and turn right to the Chinatown Gateway Park on Hudson Street and the Rose Kennedy Greenway (see N1).*

### FOO

*Continued from the First Page*

The thrice-married Mrs. Foo was one of Boston's most well-known figures for many years. Besides her famed "Den" on



RUBY FOO

Hudson st. she owned a part interest in a New York "Den." Her elaborate Chinese restaurant here was known throughout the country and leading theatrical and sports figures flocked to taste the Chinese specialties.



Ruby Foo's obituary in the *Boston Daily Globe*

### C8: Ruby Foo's Den

*Beach and Hudson Streets*

Born in San Francisco, **Ruby Foo** (1904-50) moved to Boston in 1923 where she began a single-room restaurant in Boston's Chinatown. Its popularity quickly grew, and she opened Ruby Foo's "Den" on Hudson Street in 1929—heralded as the first Chinese restaurant to successfully cater to non-Chinese clientele. Throughout World War II, the Den remained a legendary meeting place for theatrical and sports figures and other celebrities. She opened similar restaurants in New York, Miami, Washington and Providence, becoming a nationally-known restaurateur and mentor to dozens of aspiring chefs in her native Boston. In 1938, newspapers ran a photo of a Chinese baby sitting amidst rubble in a Shanghai railroad station that had been bombed by the Japanese. Foo had the child brought to the United States where she adopted him and raised him along with her other children.

*Directions: Before leaving Gateway Park, note the Tianamin Memorial dedicated in 1989 to honor the 1989 Democracy Movement in China. Walk south along Hudson to Kneeland Street. Turn right. Turn left on Tyler Street.*

### C9: Hannah Shakir and the Lebanese-Syrian Ladies' Aid Society

*76 Tyler Street*

Among the founders of the Lebanese-Syrian Ladies' Aid Society was **Hannah Sabbagh Shakir** (1895-1990) who emigrated from Lebanon with her family to the South End in 1907 when she was twelve. In 1917, she joined other women to form the society so they could raise money to send clothes, blankets, and money to contacts in Lebanon.

Their fundraising events, including plays showcasing Arab classics, made them a center for the social life of their community. They continued to provide relief for new arrivals and during World War II for people in the Near East. The society later moved to the South End (see SE24).

Hannah Shakir worked as a stitcher in a Boston textile factory as a young woman. In 1944 she opened her own textile factory, Parkway Manufacturing, in West Roxbury which employed fifteen people to make women's clothing. It continued in business for thirty years.



Mother Mary  
Joseph Rogers

### **C10: Maryknoll Sisters**

79 Tyler Street

**Mother Mary Joseph Rogers** (1882-1955), a Boston Public School graduate and teacher, founded the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, a national order whose members were first known for their professional service in China before the Communist takeover. Rogers insisted that the sisters be trained professionally for their missionary work and that they work together as equals, sharing all household tasks. Under her leadership, over 1,000 women worked throughout the world in over twenty-five different countries spreading their message of Justice, Love



and Peace in God's name, and living with and caring for those in need.

The sisters still serve all over the world today, particularly in Latin America. The mission on Tyler Street served the Chinese community until 1992.

### **C11: Quincy School**

90 Tyler Street

When the innovative Quincy School opened in 1847, teachers had their own classrooms for the first time in America. Women teachers were in charge of each grade, but were supervised by a male principal. Students sat at their own desks instead of at long benches. Boys and girls attended different grammar schools; the Quincy School was for boys.

In 1905, the Quincy school district employed Boston's first school nurse, **Annie McKay** (1867-1944), after the School Committee authorized the Visiting Nurse Association to select and supervise a school nurse. In her first eight weeks, McKay saw 125 cases in schools and made 576 home visits. Her work had such positive results with reducing absenteeism and exclusion that within two years, the school committee had authorized the hiring of thirty-three more nurses to service Boston elementary schools and the state had mandated at least one doctor and school nurse in every school system.

Today, the Chinese-American Civic Association runs a multi-service center in the building.

*"I love the expression 'the understanding of the heart.' It seems to me that understanding is the keynote of true love, just as misunderstanding is fertile soil for hatred."*

—Mother Mary Joseph Rogers



Denison House girls' basketball team, 1930

## C12: Site of Denison House

93 Tyler Street

Denison House, a woman-run settlement house, occupied three buildings across the street from the Quincy School for fifty years. Founded in 1892 by the College Settlement House Association, Denison House was directed by **Helena Dudley** (1858-1932) and **Vida Scudder** (1861-1954), a Wellesley College professor. Their shop sold crafts produced by local women. They ran a medical dispensary, a milk station, and taught English. The heritage of Lebanese, Syrian, and Italian immigrant women was honored through crafts and folk dancing. Dudley believed women's greatest need was for a living wage and helped organize the Women's Trade Union League (see C16). When aviator **Amelia Earhart** (1897-1937) was a social worker there, she showered Boston with leaflets from a plane announcing a Denison House street fair.



Amelia  
Earhart

After an earlier association with Chicago's settlement house, Hull House, labor organizer **Mary Kenney O'Sullivan** (1864-1943) worked for a time at Denison House. She lived there with her husband, John F. O'Sullivan, labor editor of the *Boston Globe*, and their three children. After his sudden death in 1902, she managed a model tenement and continued her labor organizing activities. She was one of the principal founders of the National Women's Trade Union League at Faneuil Hall in 1903 (see D17). O'Sullivan

supported many union activities, including the 1912 Lawrence textile strike. She was a strong supporter of woman suffrage and opposed the entry of the United States into World War I, joining the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1914, she became a factory inspector under the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries.



Mary Kenney O'Sullivan

## C13: Site of Rose Lok Home

Tyler Street (next to Denison House)

The first and possibly only Chinese American woman pilot to solo at what is now known as Boston's Logan Airport, **Rose Lok** (b. 1912) grew up on Tyler Street next to Denison House. She was only twenty when the U. S. Department of Commerce granted her a pilot's license in 1932. Although her parents resisted her desire to fly at first, they finally relented. She was the only woman in the group of twelve Chinese American Bostonians who formed the Chinese patriotic Flying Club to assist in the defense of China



Rose Lok



from Japan’s invading forces. In 1996, she was memorialized with a tree at the International Forest of Friendship established by the Ninety-Nines, a long time association of women’ pilots, in Atchison, Kansas, Amelia Earhart’s hometown.

*Directions: Continue to the end of Tyler Street noticing the mural of the Chinese New Year in Tai Tung Park at the corner. Turn right on Oak Street. Cross Harrison Street and turn right on Ash Street. Enter the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.*

**C14: Chinatown Community Mural: Unity and Community**

*Chinatown Neighborhood Center, 38 Ash Street*

Formerly occupying the outside wall of a four-story building, a photographic reproduction of the mural *Unity and Community* has been installed in the main lobby of the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center. In this mural, Chinese-American women are honored for their many roles in Asian-American community life. Designed by **Wen-Ti Tsen** and **David Fichter** in 1986, the colorful painting shows a woman garment worker sewing a long piece of fabric which weaves through the composition and represents women’s contribution to the

cohesiveness of the community. Before the liberalization of immigration laws, fewer than twenty percent of Chinatown’s residents were women.

*Directions: Return to Oak Street. As you cross Washington to Tremont Street, notice the friezes topping the new Quincy School designed by artist **Maria Termini**, using drawings by children in the old Quincy School. Cross Tremont Street and walk through the park passing the Church of All Nations. Continue on the walkway under the buildings to Warrenton Street.*

**C15: Site of YWCA “Working Girls Home”**

*68 Warrenton Street*

In 1873 the Boston YWCA built a six-story double house building on this site for “the good of working women.” The location not only offered housing but training with the hope of finding “new and proper avenues of employment for



*Unity and Community Mural*

women” as well as “to protect them in their rights.” Of the seventy women who lived in the building at the time of the Great Fire that year, thirty-four lost jobs and the YWCA established a sewing business to employ them. In 1908, the building had 212 boarders and had served a total of 2,645 women during the previous year. In 1895, the residents, hoping to escape the summer heat, raised money to create a roof garden on top of the building. They planted window boxes, added deck chairs, awnings and even cots. In anticipation of the opening of new headquarters at 140 Clarendon Street, the YWCA closed the building in 1927 (see BBW7).

👉 *Directions: Turn left on Stuart Street and cross it to the Transportation Building at 8-10 Park Plaza. On the corner, note the New England School of Law, the successor to the Portia Law School founded for women on Beacon Hill (see B4). Walk through the Atrium of the Transportation Building to Boylston Place.*

*“We are just like soldiers patrolling in a just cause ...not one of us will flinch until we have won.”*  
—Julia O’Connor [Parker]



Julia O’Connor [Parker]

### **C16: Boston Women’s Trade Union League**

*5 Boylston Place*

During the Great Depression, the Boston Women’s Trade Union League maintained offices and a soup kitchen in this building owned and occupied on the upper floors

by Boston’s exclusive Tavern Club for men. Soon after the National WTUL was established at Faneuil Hall in 1903, the Boston branch assisted women workers in forming trade unions and aiding strikes, including the telephone operators’ strike of 1919 (see C4). Although upper middle class women reformers began the BWTUL, women workers joined and held major offices. Among the presidents were telephone operators **Julia O’Connor [Parker]** (see C4) and **Rose Finkelstein Norwood** (1891-1980). For fifty years they also helped organize Boston library workers, retail clerks, and office cleaners.

👉 *Directions: Continue through Boylston Place. Note the new site of some Emerson College buildings at 10 Boylston Place (see BBE7). Turn left to Park Square.*

### **C17: Park Square: Women Editors, Artists, and Entrepreneurs**

*Park Square at Boylston Street*

The Park Square area and the block on Boylston Street across from the Public Garden was once a center for women editors, artists, social activists, and entrepreneurs who had offices in the

*“Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs... No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history, and, as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race.”*

—Pauline E. Hopkins, from her 1900 book *Contending Forces, A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*

small buildings that lined the street. Novelist **Pauline Hopkins** (1856-1930) edited *The Colored American* from 1900 to 1904 in an office at 5 Park Square. Her goal was to publish a journal devoted to “the development of Afro-American art and literature.” She included a series of articles, *Famous Women of the Negro Race*, and reported the news of the rejection of **Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin’s** New Era Club for membership in the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1902 (see B17). Other publications edited by women with offices in Park Square include *Our Bodies Ourselves*, published by the Boston Women’s Health Collective in 1970, and *Equal Times*, a newspaper for working women published in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. The Collective is located now in Somerville.

Many women artists studied and had studios in this area. Beginning in the 1890s until the mid twentieth century, women dressmakers, milliners, physicians, teachers, and artists working in many mediums had studios or offices on Boylston Street in the block across from the Public Garden. Conveniently placed among them by 1940 was the shop and lunchroom of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union.

### **C18: Site of Women’s Educational and Industrial Union**

*264 and 356 Boylston Street*

The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, which has served Boston women continuously for nearly 130 years, was at two different sites on Boylston Street for sixty years. In 2004, WEIU renamed itself the Women’s Union and moved downtown from this site to One Washington Mall. In 2006, they merged with Crittenton, a Boston-based housing and workforce development agency established in 1824. The new institution is called

The Crittenton Women’s Union.

WEIU’s first program was a shop selling women’s crafts and food, but it rapidly moved into job training, placement, and protection of women workers. In recent years it instituted training for licensed home day care providers and created a transitional housing programs for single mothers. **Dr. Harriet Clisby** (1831-1931) founded the WEIU together with a group of prominent Boston women. **Mary Morton Kehew** (1859-1918) led the union from 1892 until her death. Under her direction, the union continued to offer vocational training but also lobbied for legislation to protect women workers. She supported her arguments with solid social science research. Kehew was active in the programs at Denison House (see C12) and worked to foster trade unions among women workers, becoming the first president of the National Women’s Trade Union League organized in Boston in 1903 (see C16).

*Directions: Cross Boylston Street and enter the Public Garden. For the location and descriptions of fountains designed by women sculptors, see BBE1.*



An accounting class at WEIU, ca. 1940