

Improvement the Order of the Age':

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Historic Advertising, Consumer Choice,  
and Identity in 19th Century Roxbury,  
Massachusetts.



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'Improvement the Order of the Age',  
Advertising, Consumer Choice, and  
Identity in 19th Century Roxbury, Massachu

[Janice A. Nosal, University of Massachusetts Boston](#)

### Date of Award

8-31-2016

### Document Type

Open Access Thesis

### Degree Name

Master of Arts (MA)

### Department

Historical Archaeology

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### Second Advisor

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John M. Steinberg

### **Abstract**

During the mid-to-late 19th century, Roxbury, Massachusetts change from a rural farming area to a vibrant, working-class, immigrant urban community. This new demographic bloomed in the industrial age, a time in which hundreds of new mass-produced consumer markets. This thesis explores the relationship between consumption patterns and historic advertising in 19th-century Roxbury. It assesses the significance of advertising within households and compares advertisements from the Roxbury Gazette and Southwest Corridor archaeological material from the Tremont Street and Elmwood excavated in the late 1970s, to determine the degree of correlation between these sources. Separately, the archaeological and advertising materials provide facets of daily life for the residents of this neighborhood. When these two distinct data sets provide a more holistic snapshot of consumer choice. Specifically, I examine the relationship between advertisements and consumers and how tangible goods served as a medium of communication, social expectations, and individual and group identities.

Ultimately, this study found that there is little direct overlap between items from the Southwest Corridor excavations and the historic Roxbury advertisements. The most prevalent types of advertisements from the Roxbury Gazette sample largely did not overlap with the highest artifact counts from the Southwest Corridor excavations. This disconnect may be due to a number of factors, including lack of purchases or extended use lives for certain items. Factors for disconnect include archaeological deposition patterns and the way in which the archaeological and advertising data is categorized. Most importantly, this study emphasizes that the lives of Tremont Street residents cannot be neatly summed up by the materials they used. Through consideration of material culture, documentary resources, and archaeological information can we begin to understand the experiences these residents had.

### **Comments**

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### **Recommended Citation**

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