New Photo Exhibit Traces West End’s Transition from 1961-1980

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Boston, MA—In 2014, Boston’s West End neighborhood will continue its transition into a dynamic residential and corporate address. In some ways, the changing neighborhood is a reminder of the incredible transformation that occurred more than half a century ago as residents of the old West End relocated amid the slum clearance project that gave rise to a modern urban landscape.

On January 24, the West End Museum will premiere a new exhibit, A Neighborhood in Transition: 1961 - 1980, featuring the photographs of West End resident Charles Frani, who snapped hundreds of images of his changing neighborhood over the course of two decades. The opening reception takes place at 6:30 p.m. Concurrent programs will be offered throughout the run of the show, which concludes on May 11, 2014. The exhibit, reception and most of the concurrent programs are free and open to the public. (Media note: Reception and program details appear on the following pages; downloadable show-related images appear here.)

Exhibit Co-Curators Duane Lucia and Giselle Valdes spent hours poring through a large collection of Frani photographs to select those that most vividly depict the transformation and evolution of Boston’s West End. Valdes then painstakingly restored all of the chosen images—both original photo negatives and digital scans. The resulting exhibit captures the contrasting currents that swept out old West Enders while welcoming in new ones. Frani’s photographs provide a stark reminder of how thousands of Bostonians were driven from their well-worn tenement homes while others moved into gleaming, high-rise apartments.

“Most of the 8,000-plus West End residents evicted from their homes by 1960 had moved on,” according to Lucia. “However, seeing images of the final stages of the destruction of the neighborhood and the lingering few people and businesses left going about their daily chores as if normal resonates of a wartime surrealism.”

Fram captured key moments in Boston’s transition from an old, economically depressed city to a gentrified, world-class center of education, healthcare and technology. One of the featured photos shows a crowd watching as firefighters battle smoke and flames at the Old Howard Theater in Scollay Square. The Howard, which had become a burlesque house and was closed by city censors in 1951, was razed after the mysterious 1961 fire. In its place, Boston built its new Government Center.

A Neighborhood in Transition is free and open to the public during regular Museum hours.

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About the West End Museum:  
The West End Museum is dedicated to the collection, preservation and interpretation of the history and culture of the West End neighborhood. The Museum’s permanent exhibit, “The Last Tenement,” highlights the immigrant history of the neighborhood through its decimation under Urban Renewal in 1959; two additional galleries feature rotating exhibits. The Museum is located near North Station at 150 Staniford St. Suite 7. Hours: Tuesday - Friday 12:00pm - 5:00pm; Saturday 11:00am - 4:00pm. Admission is free.