The bulldozers appeared on Seneca Street in Boston’s South End on a Friday morning in late September 1955. Mayor John Hynes arrived a few minutes later with a bevy of photographers. A small crowd of residents—among those few who remained in the doomed New York Streets neighborhood—watched as Hynes knocked the first brick from the foundation of a crumbling building, marking the start of large-scale urban renewal in Boston.

Three years before the infamous demolition of the West End, New York Streets—each road named after a stop on the railroad that had once been the neighborhood’s economic engine—became the proving ground for federally funded urban renewal. The 22-acre slice of the city had been a diverse immigrant community since the mid-1800s. In the 1950s, the area today bounded by Washington, Albany and East Berkley streets and the Mass Pike was home to some 2,500 residents and the places of worship, theaters, retail shops and small factories that served and employed them.

But a 1952 Boston Housing Authority report painted a dark picture: “The most cursory inspection of the New York Streets establishes it as a blighted and deteriorated neighborhood,” the authority wrote, bemoaning the fate of the “unfortunates who inhabit the area.” The city, with federal funding, decided to raze the community with the goal of replacing aging houses with light industry and blue-collar jobs. The residents scattered.

Today, most of the New York Streets have been erased from the map of Boston and history offers but a few fading glimpses of life as in and around the neighborhood before the bulldozers arrived.