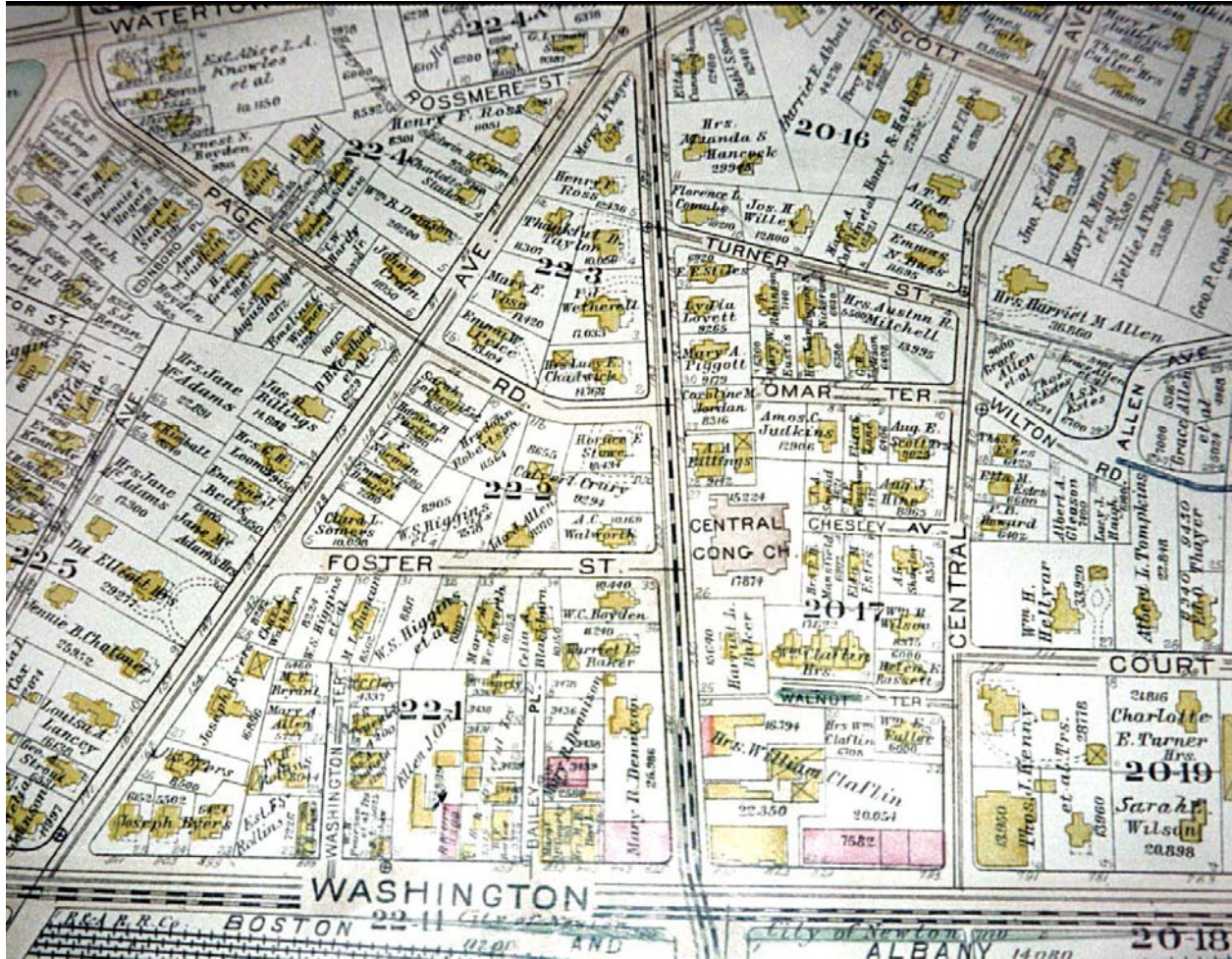


# NEWTONVILLE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

## FINAL STUDY REPORT



Map of the proposed historic district neighborhood, 1907.

Prepared by the Neighborhood Conservation Class  
of  
Boston University's Preservation Studies Program  
for  
Newton Historical Commission  
the  
Study Committee for the Proposed Local Historic District

May 2002

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## INTRODUCTION

Newtonville's character is chiefly defined by the large number of historic residences that were integral to the neighborhood's early development and remain intact today. Having begun in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, residential development in this area reached its height in the last quarter of that century, when the streetcar made this an ideal commuter suburb of Boston. Although people of various classes and occupations lived in Newtonville, the majority of the village's early residents were members of the middle class who made the daily journey into Boston to work.

Dominant architectural styles in the neighborhood include Colonial Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Second Empire, Shingle Style, and Stick Style; less frequently, examples of Cape, Craftsman, Dutch Colonial, English Cottage, Georgian Revival, Gothic Revival, and Ranch are also found. Most of the homes within the study area were built as single-family residences. Reflecting the evolution of the neighborhood and its residents, some houses have been altered to become two-family or multi-residential buildings. This type of modification primarily effects the interior of the structure, leaving the exterior untouched. Integrity of design and style remains intact in most of Newtonville's homes.

In order to protect the historic resources in this neighborhood from the threat of demolition or alteration that is not in keeping with the historic nature of the building fabric, creation of a local historic district is recommended. Following Massachusetts's early examples of successful local historic districts in Beacon Hill and Nantucket, creation of such districts has become an effective method in reducing the vulnerability of our historic resources. In Newton, local historic districts exist in Chestnut Hill and Newton Upper Falls, and a proposal for local historic adoption is currently underway in Auburndale. Under a local historic district, a Historic District Commission reviews any changes visible from a public way that are made to a resource included in the district. The Commission uses design review guidelines in considering changes to materials, design, massing, overall character, and cohesiveness with the district.

This draft study report is being submitted to the Newton Historical Commission, which in acting as the Historic District Study Committee may choose to adopt it as the study report for the proposed historic district in Newtonville.

## METHODOLOGY

### Preservation Need

As is often the case, the idea for a Local Historic District in Newtonville was generated in reaction to losses and the threat of loss of historic structures and building fabric. In February of 2000, a developer interested in buying the Calvert Crary house (MHC # 6128) at 21 Foster Street, a ca. 1897 Queen Anne/Colonial Revival commonly referred to as the "Red Cross House," proposed constructing a second building on the property and the demolition of the original home to make way for condominium units. Many neighborhood residents felt that the architectural and historical significance of the Red Cross House made it a valuable and integral

part of the Newtonville neighborhood and that it should not be demolished in the name of condominium development. A group of neighbors came together over this issue and mobilized to block the developer's plans. The threat was ultimately prevented when the Red Cross decided against selling the property to that developer and were able to find a sympathetic buyer in the Second Step Women's Shelter, who plan on restoring and adaptively reusing the building. This was not the first, nor may it be the last, instance of such development proposals in Newtonville. The overall feeling of the neighborhood could dramatically change if such condominium and other types of development are not guided by a design review process that would evoke projects that are sensitive to the historic and architectural characteristics of the area. Other types of losses have already occurred through the removal of the architectural embellishment of buildings that contribute to the richness and texture of the district. Such loss has been prevalent through the application of vinyl siding and vinyl windows. The goals of creating a local historic district in Newtonville are to preserve the rich details, textures, materials, and craftsmanship of the buildings and to maintain a consistency of size, scale and massing within the immediate area.

### Interest

As previously mentioned a group of Newtonville neighbors initially met in the winter of 2000 to discuss an appropriate course of action to address the proposed development of the Red Cross House. They waged a pitched battle against the developer—attending Newton Historical Commission (NHC) meetings at which the developer's proposals were to be reviewed and making their objections known. They also worked towards getting the Red Cross House recorded in the Massachusetts Historical Commission Historic Properties Survey and received a determination of eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Once the future preservation of the house was ensured they began to seriously consider the use of local historic districting in Newtonville as a way to preserve the vitality, setting, and character of the neighborhood and curtail inappropriate development. The neighborhood group had already been in contact with Lara Kritzer, Newton's City Preservation Planner, in regards to the Red Cross house situation, and now approached her in regards to the group's consideration of local historic districting. Ms. Kritzer provided them with information about preservation options, including local historic district designation, and helped the group map out preliminary boundaries for the district. The group had also already retained Gretchen Schuler, who wrote the architectural description for the Red Cross house's Massachusetts Historical Commission Form B-Building Survey form, as a preservation consultant and she is now aiding the group in the local historic districting process.

In May of 2000, the neighborhood residents approached the Newton Historical Commission (NHC), requesting that they serve as the Study Committee in accordance with the Newton City Ordinance for establishing new historic districts. Under Article III, Sec. 22-40 (c), "an investigation and report of the historical and architectural significance of the properties and sites within the proposed district must be made by the existing historic district commissions or by the historical commission acting as an historic district study commission pursuant to the provisions of the General Laws of Massachusetts Chapter 40C, sections 3 and 4". Under Sec. 22-39 (b) (4) of Newton City Ordinances the NHC may act as the historic district study committee for the establishment of additional historic districts upon recommendation of one or more of the historic district commissions. The Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission, at their July 2000

meeting and the Chestnut Hill Historic District Commission at their July 2000 meeting voted to defer the role of historic district study committee to the NHC. The NHC voted to assume the responsibility of being the Study Committee and accepted the volunteer assistance of the neighborhood group to gather historical and architectural information about properties to be included in the district. The role of gathering historical and architectural information was then passed on to the Boston University (BU) Preservation Studies Program's Neighborhood Conservation class, led by Gretchen Schuler, whose assistance was accepted by the neighborhood group through Ellen Fitzpatrick, acting as their spokesperson.

In November 2001 the neighborhood group held an informational meeting, attended by approximately 20 residents, including some members of the Prescott Street neighborhood group. Since the meeting, residents have been canvassing their neighbors, informing them about the local historic districting process. Attached to this report is a copy of the letter they have been circulating to neighborhood residents. In addition to this letter, the canvassers have also been distributing information from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) about local historic districts.

## Research

While roughly half the properties within the proposed Newtonville Historic District boundaries were surveyed in the early 1980s, the nine members of the BU class set about documenting the remaining buildings and updating the information on the already surveyed properties. In September of 2001 the class attended a session with Susan Abele, curator of the Jackson Homestead, to learn how to research historic properties using historic maps and atlases as well as street directories. The students recorded information for many of the properties in the study area on Massachusetts Historical Commission Form B-Building Survey Forms. Through inspection of many of the properties, the class was able to gain information about their historical and present uses, building materials, conditions, settings, alterations, and outbuildings. Atlas/map information, street directory names, water and sewer hook-up dates (if available or known) and other applicable information about the property was also recorded on the survey forms. Through the class's research they confirmed that the number of properties that pre-dated World War II in the area including Page Road, Lowell Avenue, Foster Street, Walnut Street, Turner Street, Prescott Street, and Central Avenue was high (approximately 95%). This information and research not only showed that this area reached full maturation prior to World War II, but also indicated that many of the properties were built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century for residents who commuted to their jobs in Boston everyday via the railroad.

In addition to properties within the proposed district, those properties along the northern section of Central Avenue and the top part of Lowell Avenue facing Watertown Street also were considered. Full survey forms were completed for at least three; however, it was determined that those properties would not be included in the final district boundaries for reasons that are explained in the boundary justification section.

The boundaries have shifted at least twice since the research was completed and for the purposes of completion of the student project, properties were assigned MHC numbers based on the first set of recommended boundaries. In at least three instances MHC numbers were assigned to

properties that already had numbers and properties for which there is no survey form that were thought to be included in a proposed district were also numbered. This accounted for six numbers that have been reallocated in the final data sheet and boundary determination which explains the lack of consistency of numbers on the eastern end of Prescott Street.

### Education and Information

In addition to the aforementioned neighborhood group meeting in November of 2001, the canvassing of the Newtonville neighborhood, and distribution of local historic districting information, another neighborhood meeting took place December 2, 2001 at which the BU students presented some of their research on the history of the area and their preliminary findings for this Study Report. On December 13, 2001, the BU class presented their research and a completed draft of the preliminary study report to the Newton Historical Commission. The NHC will review the information as part of their Study Committee responsibilities and will consider accepting the preliminary draft at their regularly scheduled meeting on January, 24, 2002.

In the meantime, the aforementioned neighborhood group has continued to work on educating property owners in the proposed district on the impacts of living in a local historic district. On January 21, every property owner in the proposed district was invited to a presentation at the Central Congregational Church by Chestnut Hill Chairman John Wyman, Newton Upper Falls Chairman Paul O'Shaughnessy, and City Preservation Planner Lara Kritzer on how a local historic district commission is established, what is reviewed, and the application process.

### Results

Accurate architectural descriptions for most of the properties in the proposed district will be completed prior to the establishment of the district. The architectural descriptions and photographs for each resource will serve as the foundation for review should the district be adopted.

This research and other pertinent information is submitted in the form of this draft report to the Newton Historical Commission, which will review, edit and/or rewrite as necessary. In order to adopt the Newtonville Historic District, the Newton Historical Commission, as the Study Committee, votes to adopt the Study Report for the proposed district and then submits it to the MHC and the Newton Planning Board. Not less than sixty days after submitting the report to the MHC and the Planning Board, a public hearing is to be held to discuss the Study Report. A final draft of the report, a map of the proposed district and a draft of the proposed district ordinances is then submitted to the Board of Aldermen. The proposal must then be passed by a 2/3 vote of the Board of Aldermen in order for the ordinances to be adopted. (These processes are all in accordance with the General Laws of Massachusetts Chapter 40C and Newton City Ordinance Article III Section 22-40 (c)).

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The northern section of Newtonville proposed for an historic district displays examples of many 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century residential architectural styles, evincing this area's suburban development in this period. Technological changes and availability of commuter transportation were the prime factors in this development. Although architectural styles widely varied during this period of growth, the overall massing, scale, lot size, setbacks and craftsmanship provide a great sense of cohesiveness to this neighborhood.

### Rural Agricultural Beginnings (1640's – 1830's)

Although a suburban community since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Newtonville was a sparsely settled rural agricultural area through the 1830's. First settled in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, a few streets, now major thoroughfares, had been constructed by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: Washington and Crafts Streets, Lowell Avenue, and Walnut Street south of Washington Street. Early on, Lowell Avenue was laid out as a connector between Washington Street and the road to Watertown (now Watertown Street). The earliest existing dwelling in the neighborhood stands at 157 Lowell Avenue, the **Abijah Smith House** (MHC #2296), constructed ca. 1834-1835. Originally a 1½-story vernacular farmhouse, the much-modified but well-preserved structure assumed its present configuration after Queen Anne style wings were added in the 1880's.

### The Railroad Era (1830's – 1890's)

The advent of passenger rail service with the establishment of the Boston and Worcester Railroad in 1834 ushered in a period of gradual development for the northern section of Newtonville. The railroad made permanent residence possible for successful middle-class businessmen and professionals and their families who, up to this time, had had to reside closer to their places of urban employment. The newly accessible land in Newtonville, as well as other areas along the rail line, held great appeal for its pastoral setting, seen as a healthier climate in which to live and raise a family.

Although a trend toward suburban development was well established along the railroad corridor by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Newton, Newtonville lagged behind the other villages of Newton Corner, West Newton and Auburndale. This was primarily because the relatively flat farmland offered little picturesque scenery, and no attempts were made to residentially develop large tracts of land. Several independent landowners did undertake small projects, and by mid-century upper Walnut Street and Central Avenue had been laid out.

The northern section of Newtonville lagged in development behind the area south of the rail line and was not densely developed until the 1880's and 1890's. The little residential construction that did occur prior to the 1860's was on Lowell Avenue toward Washington Street. The **Edward Brooks House** (MHC #6341), at 161 Lowell Avenue, was constructed ca. 1840-1847 in the then-popular Greek Revival style and, although much altered today, most likely originally displayed corner pilasters, a pedimented front gable, front door sidelights and a clapboard exterior. Both this house and adjacent 157 Lowell Avenue (MHC #2296) were owned by Sidney

Allen by 1848, an early commuter who traveled to his employment as a piano maker in Boston. The well-preserved Gothic Revival **John Fenno House** at 171 Lowell Avenue (MHC #2294) was built ca. 1854 at the corner of Walnut Street and Madison Avenue and was moved to its present location about 1885. Popular in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century but unusual in Newtonville, the Gothic Revival style emphasized steeply pitched gable roofs and details such as labeled hood molds over windows and tall bay windows as seen on the Fenno House, which exhibits a more conservative form of this style.

The first period of major growth in Newtonville as a whole occurred in the 1860's and 1870's, and by this time the area had become a distinct village with a suburban infrastructure including churches, stores, services and a town-wide high school. During this period, the middle-class character of the community became established, a feature that lasted until recent years. Although the northern section of Newtonville again developed at a slower rate than the southern portion, residential construction and subdivision did occur. Dustin Lancey, a builder primarily active in the southern portion of Newtonville in the 1860's, subdivided land for 20 house lots at the intersection of Central Avenue and Crafts Street in 1869. Prescott Street was also a part of this subdivision.

Residential growth in the 1870's can be seen in a number of existing Italianate and Second Empire style houses. All of the existing streets were laid out during this decade, with dwellings constructed on Page Road, Lowell Avenue, Walnut Street, Turner Street, Prescott Street and Central Avenue.

The Italianate style house, popular from about 1840 to 1880, can be characterized by the dwelling at 89 Lowell Avenue (MHC #2307), constructed in 1873 by William Denison, a Boston bookkeeper. This well-maintained residence is a front-gable house, although other examples of this style in the area have hip roofs. Italianate features also include wide eaves and a front porch supported by large paired brackets, bracketed bay windows, round arched windows, and a double door with long glass panels.

Prescott Street and intersecting Central Avenue contain the only two examples of Second Empire houses in the neighborhood, built in a style popular from the early 1860's until the early 1880's. Distinctive features of this style include straight or concave mansard roofs, boxy massing, multi-colored and patterned slate roof tiles, long porches, bay windows, and gabled dormers with segmental arched windows. Constructed in 1871, 25 Prescott Street (MHC #2343) is the oldest house on the street and was built by J. E. Abbott who owned adjacent parcels of land. Probably constructed on speculation, the house was purchased in the 1880's by George Morse, a Boston lawyer. The well-maintained house exemplifies the Second Empire style with its polychrome slate-covered mansard roof, boxy massing, and double door with long glass panels.

The pace of development quickened in the northern section of Newtonville in the early 1880's with more people choosing to reside in the neighborhood and commute into Boston. Beginning in this decade and continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup> century three builders had a great effect on residential construction in this area: Henry Ross, Willard Higgins and Theodore Nickerson. Although they established a shop in the early 1880's, Higgins and Nickerson were primarily active in the 1890's and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most active in this section of Newtonville in the 1880's was Ross, who



operated a shop on Walnut Street and a lumberyard and large mill on Crafts Street, the latter being one of the village's few 19<sup>th</sup> century industries. Rossmere Street bears this builder's name, and he constructed a number of documented houses on Lowell Avenue and Walnut Street.

Ross built many houses in the neighborhood in the Queen Anne style, a mode popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and characterized by asymmetrical forms using projecting exterior walls, complex rooflines, porches, balconies, bay windows and contrasting exterior materials as well as forms. The Queen Anne style house at 79 Lowell Avenue (MHC #2309) was built by Ross in 1884 and was soon after purchased by Edwin Cram, a bookkeeper employed in Boston. One of the most well-preserved 19<sup>th</sup> century homes in the neighborhood, the Cram House displays many distinctive and decorative Queen Anne features: decorative shingling, an offset gabled pavilion, an inset arched entrance porch, belt courses, a carved wood sunflower ornament, and an exterior chimney with molded terra cotta tiles.

### Street Railway Era (early 1890's to 1920)

A dramatic aspect of Newtonville history began in the 1890's. The village was already a daily destination for students of the local high school established in 1859 and people from outside the village who had access to the Boston and Albany Railroad station, the only suburban stopping point for all principal New York and western express trains. The centrality of Newtonville was fully recognized during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the electric street railway provided more efficient transportation. Cities and towns in metropolitan Boston were the sites of hundreds of trolley lines, and inter-urban companies linked communities, greatly increasing the accessibility of people of a variety of income levels.

Newtonville was the logical nucleus for Newton's trunk lines. Along with the Washington Street trolley, another route was built along Walnut Street, chosen in part because of its north-south access uninhibited by the steep hills of Centre Street in Newton Corner and Chestnut Street in West Newton. The Newton and Boston Street Railway Company operated the Walnut Street line from Newtonville Square to Newton Highlands, Upper Falls, and Needham. Later, after 1896, this line intersected the Commonwealth Avenue Street Railway running along Newtonville's southern border. The Newton and Watertown trolley line extended north on Walnut Street to Lowell Avenue where it then followed Watertown Street through Nonantum to Watertown Square. The Waltham and Newton line ran up Crafts Street, branching off Walnut Street to the northwest. All of these lines having Newtonville as the focal point added to the village's popularity among the hard working and upwardly mobile Newtonville citizens at the turn of the century.

Streetcar expansion in metropolitan Boston was in full swing during the 1890's, and city papers often advertised this new transportation system and its affect on the real estate of Newton's villages so changed by the new mobility. In March 1893 a *Boston Globe* article proclaimed that due to the electric street railway, increased activity was expected on the north side of Newtonville's tracks. The article also touted that the railway would introduce some of the finest building land in the city. Those given credit for allowing this land to gain in potential included enterprising real estate promoters granted charters to construct trolley tracks linking the villages

and local builders Henry F. Ross, Willard S. Higgins, and Theodore Nickerson, referred to above.

Builders Higgins and Nickerson, who had formed a partnership in the early 1880's operating a shop in Newtonville Square, achieved their greatest professional success during the village's building boom at the turn of the century. These builders engaged in speculative housing projects, many of which were initially rented. This practice shaped the built environment of the neighborhood today, including the largeness of the residences and their synthesis of popular architectural styles. Higgins' house still stands at 26 Lowell Avenue (MHC #2334), and Nickerson lived at 67 Brooks Avenue (just outside the proposed district). Together, the pair built many large single- and two-family residences north of Washington Street. Some two-dozen residences are the product of this successful firm, built on Lowell Avenue and Foster, Page and Prescott Streets.

Many neighborhood residences built in the 1890's display a transitional Queen Anne and Colonial Revival style, as seen in the **David H. Fitch House** at 62 Page Road (MHC #2316) built at a time when the picturesque and eclectic Queen Anne was giving way to the more ordered, conservative Colonial Revival style. Another example of the intermingling of these styles is the 1890 dwelling at 128 Lowell Ave (MHC #2300). Well-preserved, this home exhibits elements from both styles. The Queen Anne elements include the varied use of materials, such as decorative wood shingles and clapboarding, and the variety of window types, shapes, and sizes. The residence's Colonial Revival elements include its broad gable roof, and the proportioned and symmetrical placement of windows on each façade, which is balanced though asymmetrical.

A public building in the neighborhood, the **Central Congregational Church** at 218 Walnut Street (MHC #5598), was built in 1895 by architect William C. Richardson of the Boston-based firm Hartwell and Richardson. Built in the Romanesque Revival style, Richardson designed a dressed granite exterior dramatically incorporating arched doors and windows and a roof with a variety of shapes, reminiscent of medieval architecture. Richardson also built the landmark Masonic Hall, of the same style, at the corner of Walnut Street and Newtonville Avenue.

In the early 1890's a style appeared in Newtonville that was used by architects into the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reflect an interest in history popularized by the Centennial celebration years before. Colonial Revival homes such as 15 Page Road (MHC #6346), built around 1910, copy and embellish early American architecture and add in contemporary elements. The **Sarah Chadwick House** has a hipped roof and boxy form with a center-hall plan and symmetrical door and window arrangement all displaying its Colonial Revival style. The Colonial Revival coincided with the streetcar era in Newtonville, and because of the intense development during these years, many fine examples of variations of the style were built throughout the village by Higgins and Nickerson. Another Colonial Revival home built by Higgins is 30 Foster Street (MHC #6368), of 1901. This residence also exhibits a hipped roof and center-hall plan as well as other classical features including pedimented dormers and full-height corner pilasters. Although a number of Colonial Revival houses exist in the neighborhood, this residence is more high style.

From the 1880's through 1890's, and continuing today, the neighborhood has sustained a rental housing aspect. Early on, many Newtonville families shared their homes, often soon after purchasing them, with either family members or unrelated boarders. As previously mentioned, Higgins and Nickerson rented out a number of houses soon after their construction.

Apartment housing was also introduced into the neighborhood, with the construction of a large apartment block in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two permits were granted in 1915 to Dr. David E. Baker, who lived at 227 Walnut Street (MHC #2332), to build a 24-unit apartment house at 230 Walnut Street (MHC #3638). Two architects, Ernest N. Boyden and Gilbert Miles Ramsey may have created the large U-shaped building. **The "Colonna"** is built in the courtyard plan popularized for apartment buildings in the Boston area by Cram, Wentworth & Goodhue's Richmond Court of 1898 in Brookline.

### A Transitional Period (1920's - present)

Progress and change have continued to reshape Newtonville. The middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a transition from single-family residences to two-family houses in the neighborhood and yet visually the area and its streetscapes have largely remained intact, with some infill housing built between existing buildings. This housing, although not reflecting the predominately late 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture of the area, depicts the evolution of the streetscape.

Two examples of the infill housing are the matching Colonial Revival **Michele Guerriero Houses** (MHC #s 6338 and 6339) at 145/147 and 149/151 Lowell Avenue, built in 1941. Constructed originally as two-family dwellings, these brick residences demonstrate the evolution of the streetscape. Infill housing is primarily located on larger side lots to existing neighborhood properties. The Cape style **Edmund H. Suprenant House** (MHC #6333) at 90 Lowell Avenue, built in 1945, is another example of the infill housing. The lot for this dwelling was divided from the two abutting properties to the north and south.

Despite some later intrusions and a change to multi-family housing, this northern section of Newtonville remains a visually cohesive area of predominantly late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses. From this the neighborhood's dominant character is derived, along with the area's spacious tree-lined streets. Remaining buildings in the area share a story of the evolving culture, taste, and technology of Newtonville, while giving an historic identity to the neighborhood existing today.

## **STREET-BY-STREET DESCRIPTION**

### Lowell Avenue

#### **General Description**

Lowell Avenue is a tree-lined street where the properties have similar sized lots and maintain, in general, similar setbacks, which preserve the streetscape. The street is almost entirely comprised

of multi-family residences.<sup>1</sup> There are only three business buildings located near the corner of Lowell Avenue and Washington Street, outside of the proposed district. Twenty-seven properties were surveyed on Lowell Avenue, previously named Lowell Street. The buildings can be differentiated in the following architectural styles: twelve Queen Anne, seven Colonial Revival, one Greek Revival, two Italianate, one Cape, one Craftsman, one Shingle Style, one Gothic Revival and one stylistic altered. The predominant style on the avenue is Queen Anne, which is consistent with the major style in the whole neighborhood. Lowell Avenue embraces one of the best-preserved examples of Queen Anne in the neighborhood, which is **79 Lowell Avenue** (MHC #2309). This house will be further discussed in much detail.

In general, the surveyed properties on Lowell Avenue are in good condition. Although some of them present deteriorated elements or have had original materials replaced by new ones, the overall shape and essential elements have generally remained. The date of house construction on Lowell Avenue varies from 1840 to 1947. However, only a minority of the properties on the street (six houses) does not correspond to the major period of house construction in Newtonville, 1880 to 1910. The first owners and residents of Lowell Avenue were middle-class commuters and shop keepers/owners such as cutters, merchants, salesmen, porters and real state and insurance agents.

### Significant Properties

- **79 Lowell Avenue**, one of the most prominent examples of the Queen Anne style in Newtonville, was apparently built by Henry Ross in 1884. According to Bruce Fernald in *Newton's 19<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture: Newtonville*, "The street façade of this house contains an inset entrance porch and a gable-roofed offset pavilion, features which add variety to the building's rectangular form. Two popular Queen Anne style motifs found in this residence are the carved wood sunflower panel above the attic window and the prominent exterior chimney with molded terra cotta tiles." The bay's first floor is polygonal with brackets above. This front-gable building has sawtooth shingles and is very well preserved.
- **115 Lowell Avenue**, built in 1925, is one of the few examples of Dutch Colonial style in the neighborhood. Although it is an early 20<sup>th</sup> century property, it has importance in illustrating common Dutch Colonial features since it is very well preserved. It is slightly smaller in size and scale compared to the other houses in this neighborhood. This symmetrical property has a full-height entry and shed roof dormers. The projecting porch is supported by two classical columns and ornamented with a triangular pediment. It has a gambrel roof.
- **128 Lowell Avenue**, built in 1890, is a fine example of the properties that were built when the picturesque Queen Anne was giving way to the more ordered and conservative Colonial Revival Style. This well-preserved house is a significant example of stylistic cross-pollination. The off-center entrance on the main façade is detailed with molded trim, sidelights, and a paneled door with light. The wrap porch is cornered by tapered columns on shingled posts. Fenestration shows various window types, shapes, and sizes.

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<sup>1</sup> This classification is based on the Newtonville Zoning Ordinances

Other important properties on Lowell Avenue are numbers 157, 161 and 171. Although altered, they have extensive historical importance for this neighborhood and are the oldest properties in the area proposed for an historic district.

- **157 Lowell Avenue**, built circa 1834-1835, is a Queen Anne style house that has, overall, a good integrity of architectural fabric with its well-preserved amalgam of many additions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two flanking wings to the north and south that were constructed in the 1880's subsumed the house. The cross-gabled main block of the house has numerous roof planes. A diamond-paned window faces south and a wide fascia board blocks hints at its Greek Revival origin.
- **161 Lowell Avenue**, a Greek Revival example built approximately in 1840-1847, has many later additions from the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century diminishing the integrity of its architectural fabric. Asbestos shingles and aluminum siding now cover practically all the wall and trim of the property. However, the house's overall massing of Greek Revival detail attest to its age and add to the architectural character of the neighborhood. Greek Revival elements probably included flat pilaster strips, a wide flat frieze band running under the molded cornice, which has a wide overhang and a discontinuous pedimented front gable.
- **171 Lowell Avenue**, built ca. 1854, is one of the rare examples of Gothic Revival in Newtonville and it has been placed in the National Register of Historic Places. The eared label moldings over windows, the diamond-shaped windows, the bracketed bay window and the uncommon wall dormer over the entrance porch are elements that attest the Gothic Revival style. According to Bruce Fernald in *Newton's 19<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture: Newtonville*, "The residence at 171 Lowell Avenue is a very conservative example of the Gothic Revival Style. Its clapboarded walls and lack of "inch-board finery" demonstrate the lasting influence of the austere Greek Revival style among village builders and home buyers." The property, however, sustained major alterations in 1987 and 1988.

### Similar Properties

It is important to mention that the two examples of Italianate styles on Lowell Avenue (89 and 119) have similar exterior features consistent to the older style they represent. They were both built in the 1870's and have received many additions, especially in the last two decades. However, they still add to the 19<sup>th</sup> century residential character of Lowell Avenue and help in understanding the neighborhood's early development.

- **89 Lowell Avenue**, built in 1873, is an Italianate style house that has front-gable roof with wide eaves and decorative pair brackets on each side of the building. At the top of the front wall, there are small modillion blocks as ornaments and a molded trim with a patterned design representing a small leaf. The front door, a doubled leaf door with long vertical glasses, is apparently original. The property has a full width porch with square posts and turned urn shaped balustrade. The residence has a two-car garage from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

- **119 Lowell Avenue**, built between 1871 and 1873, is an Italianate style house that has preserved its essential architectural fabric. This dwelling has overhanging eaves accented by paired scrollwork brackets. The modillion and dentil work along the side eaves were added in the 1970's, replacing original paired scrollwork brackets. The hipped roof dormer replaced an original gabled dormer in the 1970's. A small one-car garage (ca. 1920's) sits to the rear of the house.

Other similar properties in size, scale and style are 118, 114 and 10 Lowell Avenue. All Colonial Revival style, their overall design is very similar. Both 114 and 118 Lowell Avenue are believed to be built by Willard Higgins and Theodore Nickerson. Both properties have features of these builders' Colonial Revival style designs. Higgins' house still stands at 26 Lowell Avenue.

Some of the properties surveyed on Lowell Avenue do not follow the normal development patterns of the neighborhood because they were mid-20<sup>th</sup> century infill housing on existing larger lots. Three examples of this are 90, 145/147 and 149/151, which were built in the 1940's.

- **90 Lowell Avenue** is the only Cape style surveyed in the area and was built in 1947.
- **145/147 and 149/151 Lowell Avenue** were constructed around 1941-1942 by builder Michele Guerriero. They are both Colonial Revival style two-family dwellings.

## Walnut Street

### **General Description**

Walnut Street is mainly comprised of multi-family residences first constructed as single-family dwellings. Original residents and owners of this street included middle class people with trades and professions such as locksmith, upholsterer, carpenter, clerk, salesmen, shopkeeper and actuary. According to Newton's city atlases, there were only three houses standing on Walnut Street before the 1880's.

Sixteen properties were surveyed on Walnut Street representing five different architectural styles: Queen Anne, Stick Style, Shingle Style, Italianate, and Victorian. The date of construction of these properties is fairly consistent, ranging from the 1870's through the 1890's. At least four of the surveyed properties on Walnut Street (130, 137, 141/143 and 153) were probably constructed by Henry Ross, one of the most prominent builders in Newtonville. Ross moved to Newton in 1872 to start a contracting business and his mill and lumberyard on Crafts Street had 150 employees. Ross also built many other houses in the neighborhood. Walnut Street contains two important Newtonville properties: a Romanesque Revival church built in 1895 and "The Colonna," an apartment building built in 1915.

The overall condition of the surveyed houses on Walnut Street is fair. While most have vinyl or aluminum siding and/or vinyl windows, they have retained some remnants of their historic qualities including massing, size and overall form. Furthermore, despite the fact that many of their historic architectural features have been covered, there are enough remaining characteristics

that indicate that they are late 19th century houses. Some of these characteristics are evident such as porches, roof lines, towers, chimneys and the asymmetrical plans.

### **Significant Properties**

- **130 Walnut Street**, built around 1875-1886, is an archetypal and well-preserved example of the modest Queen Anne style homes built by the middle class residents of Newtonville. It is exceptional to its immediate surrounding because it retains its original wood shingles, both plain and decorative, chamfered porch posts, porch railings, cornices and window moldings. This cross-gabled house has a one-story wraparound porch.
- **177 Walnut Street** is a large Queen Anne residence featuring many of the elements indicative of this style. There are a massive gable roof, two projecting bays, wall dormer and decorative trim. Below the gable roof are a series of decorative brackets. A large polygonal tower rises from the first to attic stories capped with a polygonal roof. A porch wraps around the entire front featuring decorative balustrades, turned corner posts, an open arch and a ground screen.
- **218 Walnut Street**, the Central Congregational Church built in 1895 by the architect William Richardson, is listed on the National Register of Historical Places. It has granite as major exterior material. Newton Historical Commission's survey from 1985, reveals that "the granite structure marks the prosperity of the congregation and the community as it replaced a wooden building at a cost of more than \$100,000." Syrian arch entranceways, a four-story square tower with slate and steeply pitched roof vented by a broad dormer and capped by a cooper finial are the most important architectural features of this Romanesque Revival style church.
- **230 Walnut Street**, built in 1915, is an apartment building called "The Colonna." This Classical Revival style building has stucco as its exterior wall fabric, and it is in good condition. However, the structure has suffered several changes over the years. For instance, its original 24 units were subdivided into smaller units and some of the windows were replaced. The building has an asphalt-shingled skirt roof supported by large wooden brackets. According to the survey done by the Newton Historical Commission in 1987, this is one of very few apartment houses built in early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Newton.

It is important to mention that Walnut Street has several Italianate style houses that are representative of the earlier development of the neighborhood such as **160** (built ca. 1877-1892), **174** (built in 1871) and **190** (built in 1871).

### Central Avenue

#### **General Description**

Central Avenue is mainly comprised of multi-family residences. Original residents and owners of the houses on this street included middle class people with trades and professions such as

salesman, builder, tailor, paying teller, physician, nurse, carpenter and barber. It is important to mention that only two existing houses were built on Central Avenue before 1880 in order to understand how this street fits into the rest of the neighborhood development process.

Five properties were surveyed on this street representing four different styles: Colonial Revival, Queen Anne, Ranch and Dutch Colonial. The date of construction of these properties ranges from the 1870's to 1931. A number of properties on Central Avenue received later additions, greatly modifying their original architectural fabric.

### **Significant Properties**

- **41/43 Central Avenue**, built around 1893-1895, mixes Queen Anne and Colonial Revival style features. The residence was originally a two-family home while most others in the neighborhood were single-family. A decorative dentil band runs along the eaves of the porch below the flat roof. Single painted wooden Doric columns with an ornamented dentil band and cornice at the shed roof roofline support a portico in the secondary entry. A two-car detached garage lies at the southwest corner of the lot.
- **53 Central Avenue**, built in 1871, is a very well preserved Italianate residence. It is a two-and-a-half story dwelling with telescoping two-story and one-story eaves at the rear. An offset gable roof caps the building. A boxed cornice with slotted, paired brackets runs at the eaves. A verandah encloses this entrance with three bays on the east. Turned posts with incised brackets comprise the ornament of the verandah that has a pedimented entrance bay. A rising sun carving and a dentil band are incorporated into the bay.

## Prescott Street

### **General Description**

All of Prescott Street from Lowell to the dead end one long block east of Central Avenue is included in the proposed local historic district. Of the twenty dwellings fronting on Prescott Street within this area, ten had been surveyed previous to this study. All have been surveyed for the purposes of this local historic district initiative. The scale and setback of most residences along this street are consistent, although style, size, and date of construction vary. Built in 1871, 25 Prescott Street is the oldest house on this street. Three homes built between 1890 and 1895, and three more after the turn of the twentieth century later followed its construction. Although most lots are rectangular, their proportions and total size vary greatly, with the largest lot being that of 25 Prescott Street. Most of the homes along the western end of Prescott Street are single-family residences in good condition. A number of the houses on the eastern end of Prescott have been converted to two-family dwellings. As was common in Newtonville, some early inhabitants of this street commuted to work in the city.

### **Significant Properties**

- **16 Prescott Street** Known as the Steven F. Chase House, this Queen Anne/Colonial Revival house was built in 1895. A single-family residence, this side-hall plan home



remains in good condition. Consistent with the Queen Anne style, this house exhibits decorative ornamentation including a flared belt course, dentilled boxed cornices, a fan carving above the third-story window, and a shell carving in the porch's pediment.

- **22 Prescott Street** Also designed in a combination of the Queen Anne/Colonial Revival styles, this single-family home was built in 1892. Similar to its next-door neighbor, 16 Prescott Street, this house has decorative elements such as carved foliage designs in two pediments on the front façade, various roof shapes, and a decorative belt course.
- **34 Prescott Street** This 1890 home and its accompanying carriage barn sit on Prescott Street's biggest lot. One of the larger homes on Prescott Street, this house is nevertheless cohesive with its neighbors in age, style, and historical significance. Ornamented with a dentilled projecting cornice and sawtoothed shingles, this home is currently being restored by its owners.
- **62 Prescott** This late Queen Anne style house was built ca. 1890 with a broad hipped roof, wood shingled wall covering and a verandah carried by columns. Its picturesque design that features a polygonal tourelle similar to those found on other Newtonville buildings.
- **66 Prescott** Like its neighbor next door at 62 Prescott, this house was built circa 1890 in the picturesque Queen Anne/Colonial Revival style. The design features a blocky form that is relieved by elements such as an inset third-story balcony, a stairhall window with raised field paneling, and a decorative keystone, and a broad verandah with arched valencing.
- **67 Prescott** This gable front 2 ½-story 2-bay Italianate dwelling features a side hall entry, full width porch carried by paired squared columns and single pilasters.
- **75 Prescott** This Colonial Revival house has a steep hip roof and full width hip porch carried by tapered square columns with fluting and turned balusters. Other features include pediment dormers, with 2 windows each, a 2-story rear el, raised basement, and within the porch, an enclosed glazed entrance porch.

## Turner Street

### **General Description**

The proposed local historic district includes the portion of Turner Street between Walnut Street and Central Street. Five houses on four lots front along this section of the street; all have been surveyed. Houses with similar setbacks and differing lot sizes characterize this short block. Three of the houses exhibit the Colonial Revival style, while the remaining two are Italianate. Dates of construction begin in 1867 and end in 1910, showing the continued development of this

area. Many of these houses, initially constructed as single-family homes for residents who commuted to work in Boston, have now been divided into multi-family units.

### Significant Properties

- **15 Turner Street** Built circa 1880, this Italianate house shares a lot with 21 Turner Street. According to Bruce Fernald in *Newton's 19<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture: Newtonville*, this structure “features a pair of bay windows on its main façade, indicative of an earnest effort to avoid the box-like geometry associated with the earlier Greek Revival style. The bays are given full architectural treatment with projecting cornices accented by...dentils.” The front façade is on differing planes, providing a more textured presentation toward the street.
- **21 Turner Street** The second house to be built on this lot, this Italianate home was built for Joseph H. Willey sometime between 1879 and 1883. Set on an exposed rubble foundation, this wooden clapboarded two-and-a-half story rectangular plan house had two chimneys and a verandah. Consistent with its Italianate style, this structure exhibits a boxed cornice at the eaves and turned posts and scroll-sawn balusters on the verandah.

## Foster Street

### General Description

Only one block long, Foster Street runs between Lowell Avenue and Walnut Street. Eight properties front onto this road; six have been surveyed. Of these six, two are Queen Anne, two are Colonial Revival, one is Georgian Revival, and one is Stick Style/Shingle Style. These eight houses were built between 1892 and 1953, although most date from 1892 to 1909. Foster Street provides a continuous streetscape; with the exception of 21 Foster Street, which has a lot nearly double the size of others on the street, the houses are all of similar setback, size, orientation, and lot size. Most houses along this street are single-family homes.

Early residents on this street were employed in jobs such as piano manufacturing in Boston, the title business in Boston, and watch manufacturing in Waltham; they also included a local builder, Willard Higgins at 30 Foster Street, and carpenter, James W. Allen, at 15 Foster Street.

### Significant Properties

- **30 Foster Street** Built in 1901 by local builder W. S. Higgins, this two-story, rectangular plan Colonial Revival home has two projecting bays on the west elevation and two on the front façade as well as a projecting porch. Classical features include pedimented gable-roofed dormers on three sides, a heavy modillion cornice, and boxed pilasters at all four corners.
- **40 Foster Street** This house, built in 1909, is a combination of the Stick and Shingle Styles. Most distinctive are its large false gambrel roof on the front façade, which becomes a shed roof in the rear, and the ornamentation on two gable-roofed dormers on

the front façade. These dormers and a pediment on the full-width front porch have wide verge boards and a drop pendent. A hip-roofed dormer centered on the front façade has exposed rafters. Theodore C. Nickerson, who along with his partner, Willard S. Higgins, was a prominent local builder, built this house and rented it for two years following its construction.

## Page Road

### **General Description**

Included in the proposed local historic district are eighteen properties on Page Road and two on Edinboro Place, a dead-end street that runs off of the south side of Page Road. The houses included in the district along Page Road are consistent in size, lot size, setback, and orientation, although they vary in style and construction date. Exceptions are 12 Page Road, which has a greater setback than its neighbors, and 11-13 and 14 Edinboro Place, which are oriented toward Edinboro Place on an east-west axis rather than toward Page Road on a north-south axis. Although some houses have been covered in artificial siding, the historic nature of the neighborhood remains evident in these structures. Architectural styles here include seven Queen Anne, three Colonial Revival, one Dutch Colonial, one Italianate, and eight houses in a combination of styles.

The first home on Page Road, number 52, appeared between 1880 and 1897. This was followed by a height of building in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>. The newest houses on Page Road, all built circa 1917, are 11-13 and 14 Edinboro Place, and 67 Page Road. Most houses on this street were built as single-family residences, although many have been altered for multi-family use. Like many of Newtonville's residents, most early residents on this street commuted to work in Boston. Residents' occupations included teacher, veterinarian, insurance, clerk, architect, reverend, and salesman.

### **Significant Properties**

- **52 Page Road** The earliest structure to be constructed on Page Road, this Italianate house was first inhabited by Augusta Page before she moved to another home in Newtonville. The property remained in the name of Augusta or Emma Page for close to forty-five years. This center hall, square plan house displays brackets under a hip roof, a single gable-roofed dormer in the center of the front façade, and a two-story projecting bay on the east elevation. A T-shaped porch with decorative balusters and latticework runs the width of the house and projects forth from the center entrance. This house has been well maintained and is in good condition.
- **16 Page Road** Built between 1894 and 1895, this two-story Queen Anne style house has a multi-planed roof, a two-story polygonal tower topped with a bell-shaped roof, molded belt courses at each floor, and a richly ornamented porch. This house is very well maintained, and retains original six-over-one sash windows.

## BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

The proposed local historic district corresponds to a range of historical and architectural development indicative of the growth of Newtonville into a suburban village close to Boston. Educated businessmen, skilled craftsmen and other types of workers settled here in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries for the village's close proximity to the railroad and street car lines, which took many of them to their jobs in Boston each day. This part of Newtonville is distinct and cohesive due to its substantial collection of spacious single-family residences (although many are now zoned for multi-family occupancy), most of which were built at the end of the 19th century and display a rich multitude of architectural styles, from Italianate to Queen Anne to Colonial Revival and more.

The area that was reviewed for possible inclusion in the Newtonville Local Historic District is bound by major routes or land uses and contains the following:

- Lowell Avenue to the northwest and north, Prescott Street to the northeast, Central Avenue to the east, Turner Street and Walnut Street to the southeast, Foster Street to the south, and Lowell Avenue to the southwest and Page Road to the west.

As will be shown in the proceeding description, the recommended boundaries of the Newtonville Historic District create approximately the same size district as the study area described above, although certain properties at the edges of the study area were excluded for a variety of reasons. The established boundaries are natural breaks in context or clear borders of the district such as major roads, open space or changes in development patterns that are readily understandable through differences in scale, massing, and period of construction. While there is some sentiment in the community that the boundaries should be more restrictive, in the interest of district continuity and protection of historical and architectural integrity, the proposed boundaries have been appropriately marked out. The proposed district includes some of the few remaining early 19th century buildings, many of the properties developed primarily in response to the construction of the railroad and streetcar stops in the late 19th century, and a small number of early to late 20<sup>th</sup> century structures.

At the perimeter of the larger study area there are properties that deviate from those of the proposed district: some represent different or later patterns of development, some are smaller, less opulent houses, and some appear to be oriented away from the district. Developments of a different scale or from a later time period can be significant in their own right, but the architectural elaboration and neighborhood development patterns exhibited by such structures are often dissimilar to those of late 19th century subdivisions. Such discrepancies have been, in part, the foundation upon which these boundary decisions were established.

The northwest and northern edges of the district extend from the front property lines of 26 to 75 Lowell Avenue and also include the properties at 130 and 137 Walnut Street as part of this boundary line. The properties to the northeast of 26 Lowell (numbers 2 through 20 Lowell Avenue) were not included in the district because they are oriented away from the district. The open green space on the north side of Lowell Avenue, which is not included in the district, creates a natural boundary separating the district from the properties on Watertown Street. However, although this green space does create a logical boundary for the district, it should be

noted that the properties on Watertown Street, between Walnut and Crafts Street, are generally well preserved and architecturally significant late 19th and early 20th century structures whose style and massing are consistent with that found within the district. Therefore, should an expansion of the boundaries be discussed in the future, this area could be considered for inclusion in the district.

The northeast edge of the boundary extends from 15 the full length of Prescott Street to 86 and 87 Prescott at the dead end of this street and includes both sides of Prescott. Originally the study only extended along the western end of Prescott, however, many residents of the east end of Prescott Street expressed an interest in being included in the proposed district, thus properties have been surveyed and added to the proposed district because development patterns are consistent with the rest of the district. The properties on Crafts Street were not included because most of them are oriented away from the district. The section of Central Avenue located north of Prescott Street was excluded because the east side of Central Avenue contains mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century infill construction, such as numbers 14-16 and 22-24, and the west side of the street consists of many structures that are altered and/or have lost historic fabric.

The east edge of the boundary includes the eastern part of Prescott Street to its end and extends south of the property on the southeast corner of Prescott and Central Avenue, 47 Prescott Street, to 56 Central Avenue and includes the properties on both sides of Central Avenue. This section of the boundary contains homes of an eclectic mix of architectural styles, including Second Empire, Queen Anne, Stick Style, Colonial Revival and Dutch Colonial. The southern portion of Central Avenue, below Turner Street, was not included in the district because the structures found there are of a dissimilar scale, massing, quality of craftsmanship and development pattern than those on the northern section of the street.

The southeast edge extends from 12 to 24 Turner Street and then continues down Walnut Street from numbers 182 to 230 (130 to 179 Walnut Street are also located within the district, but do not constitute this boundary line) and includes both sides of both streets. The portion of Turner Street included in the district contains a number of homes of Italianate, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles which are consistent in scale, massing, setting, and quality of craftsmanship with many found throughout the proposed district. The easternmost end of Turner Street was not included in the district as there is a significant change in development pattern in this cul-de-sac, and the houses here are modern, mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. The southeast end of Walnut Street contains two properties that are of particular significance to Newtonville's social and architectural history. The first, 218 Walnut Street, is the Central Congregational Church, an 1895 Romanesque Revival style building individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The second, 230 Walnut Street, is the "Colonna", a ca. 1915 Spanish Colonial Revival apartment building believed to be the earliest apartment complex built in the neighborhood. The Colonna and the house across the street from it, 227 Walnut Street, mark the edge of the southeast boundary at Walnut Street. Properties south of this line were not included as they are part of the commercial corridor of Washington Street, are subject to different zoning laws, and primarily consist of commercial-style buildings from the 1920s or later.

The rear property lines on the south side of Foster Street, the buildings of which are oriented inward upon the district, make up the southern edge of the boundary. Foster Street is comprised of spacious Queen Anne and Colonial Revival style homes that retain much of their original ornamentation, and the inward orientation of the houses on the south side of the street creates a logical border between the residential and commercial districts.

The southwest edge of the boundary includes the properties from 115 to 171 Lowell Avenue on both sides of the street, except between 137 and 171, where the district includes the west side of the street only (26 to 133 Lowell Avenue are also located within the district, but do not constitute this boundary line.) The buildings at the southern-most portion of the east side of Lowell Avenue make up part of the commercial district and therefore were not included in the proposed historic district. The properties behind Lowell Avenue, on Brooks Avenue and Proctor Street, were not incorporated into the district because they represent a change in architectural scale and massing that is inconsistent with most of the houses located within the proposed district. However, should an expansion of the boundaries be discussed in the future, Brooks Avenue and Proctor Street could be considered for inclusion in the district because the majority of these homes retain a great deal of their architectural elaboration and display a clear pattern of historic development, albeit a somewhat different pattern than the adjacent homes on Lowell Avenue and Page Road.

Both sides of Page Road, including Edinboro Place and Edinboro Circle, make up the western boundary edge, with the exclusion of 77, 83, and 86 Page Road, which were not included because they are oriented away from the district toward Walker Street and Watertown Street. The majority of homes on Page Road are Queen Anne or Colonial Revival in style and date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, making them consistent in both style and development period with the rest of the district. Rossmere Street was not included in the district because it contains relatively newer residences that were originally built as multi-family homes, indicating a different pattern of development from the majority of residences in the proposed district that were originally built as single family residences.

While there are a handful of properties that were constructed after the World War II period and a few others that may have lost some of the architectural details located within the proposed local historic district, these boundaries do well to protect a cohesive neighborhood of residences and one institutional building infused with historical and architectural integrity.