



# CITY OF NEWTON CITY-WIDE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY: PUBLIC EDUCATION REPORT



Newton Department of Planning and Development  
Newton Community Preservation Committee

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CPC website.

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## TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRANSITIONS

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the villages which make up the City of Newton witnessed a great deal of change. An influx of immigrants, changes in transportation and manufacturing affected the City. The number of foreign born residents grew steadily from 22% of the population in 1865 to 29% of the population in 1905. Most lived and worked in the manufacturing areas of the City. The village of Waban emerged due to the upgrading of the Circuit Railroad, and the village of Nonantum witnessed an expansion of the worker neighborhood. As the century progressed, manufacturing became less prominent in the Upper and Lower Falls, while Nonantum continued to thrive. Even though most street car lines were abandoned by 1930, intensive residential development continued due to the increasing popularity of the automobile, and the improvement of local roads as auto highways.

The introduction of automobile travel led to an advance in social services throughout the City. One such effort in the early twentieth century was the attempt of the Bowen School Committee to develop community life in Thompsonville. Located on the edge of Newton Centre, the village was named after a hermit who had lived there in the previous century. While the original

inhabitants were of German descent, Irish and then Italian immigrants lived there as well. By 1920, the Italian-American population was approximately 700.

Following World War II, the City financed a housing project for veterans who resided in Newton before the war. Known as Oak Hill Park, 412 small houses were constructed on the property of the Highland Sand and Gravel Pit. It proved to be the largest local project of its kind. Oak Hill Park, which began 1946, was dedicated in 1950. The north section of the City

A brick armory was constructed in 1911 in West Newton and was first used by the Claflin Guard, also known as Company C, Fifth Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia. In 1915, military drills including infantry tactics, rifle practice, first aid, and rules of military courtesy were taught there (Rowe 1930). The building is still standing and is used by the National Guard.

witnessed considerable disturbance along the path of the former Boston & Albany Railroad in the 1960s, with the construction of the

Massachusetts Turnpike. Each of the villages along the path (Newton Corner, Newtonville, West Newton and Auburndale) were changed in varying degrees. In addition, part of a glacial esker (a relict ice-age deposit) that ran from behind Woodland Road around Haskell Pond, and across Woodland Golf Course to the Newton-Wellesley Hospital, was removed.

Today, Newton is known for its many villages that appear as distinct communities within an urban setting. City officials suggest Newton's appeal lies in its proximity to Boston with a variety of convenient highway and transportation systems, in addition to attractive and orderly neighborhoods and high property values.



## PUBLIC HERITAGE

Though many aspects of Newton's history are well documented, historic and archaeological research continues to produce new information, thereby deepening our understanding and appreciation of Newton's unique heritage. Newton contains a wide variety of archaeological sites and historical structures related to various aspects of the City's history.

A number of important interpretive themes can be developed based on the City's history and heritage landmarks. These include:

- 1) Native American Land Use and Settlement,
- 2) European American Early Settlement of Newton,
- 3) Agricultural Pursuits,
- 4) Economy and Industry,
- 5) Overland Transportation,
- 6) Religious and Burial Traditions,
- 7) Domestic Life and the Social Fabric of the Community over Time,
- 8) Civic Life and Public Buildings, and
- 9) Twentieth-Century Transitions.

These themes can be used as jumping off points for specific types of City initiatives, while individual sites can serve as components for broader City programs. Native American and historic sites in Newton can be useful for purposes of educating local residents, promoting tourism, and further protecting the historic resources of the City.



*Map of the City of Newton in 1920 (Walker Lith. & Pub. Co.).*

## Signage

A series of road and trail-side signs can be developed that highlight some of the interesting events in Newton's past. Examples of such sites would include the location of Lt. John Spring's grist mill, the Bemis rolling dam, the location of First Period houses, early meeting houses, mill sites, historic roadways, and train stations. Elements from the existing Walking Tours developed by the City Department of Planning and Development can be used to create signage explaining the unique place that each village holds in Newton's development. These signs can be combined with Native American information to develop a comprehensive tour of Newton's historic sites, perhaps similar to the Freedom Trail in Boston. The existence of such a driving and/or walking tour could be useful in promoting Newton as a tourist destination, in turn adding to the local economy.

## Educational Programs

A number of different educational programs could be developed for both residents and visitors that would highlight Newton's unique cultural heritage beginning with Native Americans, and their relationship to the Charles River. Transportation networks, which are often overlooked, have played an important role in the City's development. A closer look at

## Promoting Tourism

The described initiatives could be combined to highlight the many interesting aspects of Newton's history, in order to promote additional visits to the City from neighboring towns in Massachusetts. Aspects of this could include walking or driving tours, which might incorporate signage locations; displays in the Newton Free Library, Newton Historical Society, and local historic houses. Interest in the abolition movement, private schools, railroads, religious history, and other themes could be highlighted which may appeal to different segments of the population using the existing themes as a guide.

these networks can be informative, quite interesting, and a perspective not explored by many other communities. The use of Native Trails by the early settlers, the poor condition of roads that limited travel through the end of the nineteenth century, the arrival of the railroads and street cars, and finally the highways of the twentieth century all held important consequences for village development. A possible title for this thematic interpretive effort could be "Pathways to the Present: Rivers, Trails Rails and Highways." It would be important to include actual visits to locations in Newton,

to connect to the landscape, and to provide a sense of how the event or place was shaped in relation to the overall theme and historic contexts developed in this report. Similarly, interpretive themes could be used to develop historic displays in the Newton Free Library, at the Newton Historical Society, or other public locations, such as the entranceway to the City Hall.

## Web Site

The interpretive themes can also be used on the City's web site to highlight different aspects of Newton's past. Text from this complete report can serve as the basis for these presentations. The web site could link to photos, maps, buildings, and other web sites to guide the user through aspects of the history of the City, and encourage them to explore the landscape themselves, guided by the signage initiative. Changing the themes on the web site at some regular interval could pique interest and encourage return visits.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HERITAGE PROTECTION PLAN

The City of Newton is fortunate to contain a wide variety of archaeological sites, which offer a unique link between today's residents and the past inhabitants of the City. They include Native American sites, and historic period residential and industrial sites. In Newton, as in other Massachusetts cities and towns, these sites are finite, fragile, and frequently endangered resources. The great majority of the land in Newton has not been professionally surveyed; in fact only 15 professional archaeological surveys have been conducted in the City. Thus, eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for most inventoried archaeological sites in the City is unknown. Final determination of eligibility would depend upon the results of future testing and research. It can be assumed that additional, significant, unrecorded Native American and historic period archaeological sites exist in the City.

It is highly recommended that Newton establish an archaeological site protection program. The consideration of the town's cultural heritage resources, including standing structures, historic landscapes and buried archaeological sites should be integrated into the municipal



*Coletti-Magni Park, Silver Lake, Nonantum. An important center of Italian-American heritage and part of the City's developing archaeological record.*

review of construction permits. The intended result is not an archaeological survey for every project that will involve ground disturbance. Rather, it is to ensure that the City (through its Commissions and Departments) is

empowered to request surveys of areas considered archaeologically sensitive, in specific cases where state or federal regulations do not already require such

survey. In specific instances where archaeological concerns exist, Newton regulatory organizations should refer construction permit applications to the Newton Department of Planning and Development, and/or Newton Historical Commission for review. As appropriate, these agencies can then consult the Massachusetts Historical Commission to determine whether archaeological survey is warranted, and to discuss the extent of any survey that is necessary.

The protection of Newton's archaeological and cultural heritage will be enhanced by the formulation of an archaeological site protection plan, and the adoption of City regulations or ordinances pertaining to the management of archaeological resources. Because an ordinance will depend on public support for its adoption and enforcement, it should reflect the historic preservation priorities of Newton's diverse communities, past and present. These priorities should therefore include the protection and investigation of archaeological resources associated with both Native American occupations and with Newton's historic period settlement.

Permit applications for construction projects in Newton frequently are submitted to municipal regulatory organizations or state agencies for review and approval. These permits pertain to various undertakings, including highway construction, natural gas pipelines, sewer systems, residential subdivisions, athletic fields, and additions to private homes. Based on their scope and possible effects, some undertakings are

reviewed at the municipal level, while others are reviewed by the state.

Any undertaking that entails ground disturbance in an archaeologically sensitive area has the potential to disturb important Native American or historical archaeological resources, or "sites." The public pays in part for many development projects, such as new schools, libraries, affordable housing, and municipal sewer systems. The permit applications for such construction projects are reviewed by the state. Other development actions, such as gas pipelines, cell phone and telecommunications towers, and highway projects, are subject to federal permitting or review. In these instances, state and federal regulations require that archaeological resources in proposed impact areas be considered, and that professional archaeological surveys be conducted, if necessary. Federal agencies (such as the Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Aviation Administration) and state agencies (such as the Massachusetts Highway Department) often review projects under legislation that requires compliance with cultural resource regulations.

The majority of development actions, however, are privately funded, located on private property, or designed to avoid the impacts to natural resources (such as wetlands) that can trigger federal or state review under the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 9, Sections 26-27C, or other regulations. In short, permit

applications for such undertakings are reviewed only at the municipal level, by City regulatory organizations. Of course, the privately funded development actions in the latter category typically entail ground-disturbing activities that are equally likely to disturb archaeological resources. Consequently, municipalities that adopt ordinances to consider impacts to archaeological sites are better equipped to preserve and protect their cultural heritage, because archaeological surveys can be conducted in areas of concern to the community that would not otherwise be surveyed under state or federal regulations.

## **Education and Public Participation**

The Newton Department of Planning and Development/Newton Historical Commission, and perhaps in conjunction with the Newton Historical Society, should develop a public education program aimed at developing public appreciation for the importance of Native American and historic period archaeological sites.

The focus of the program should be to raise the consciousness of archaeological issues in the City. Education is one of the most cost-effective means of providing protection for sites. Appreciation of the importance of archaeological sites begins with the very young. Today's curriculum in elementary and secondary schools often includes archaeology and history.

It is important for the Newton Department of Planning and Development/



Newton Historical Commission to establish a relationship with curriculum development personnel in the local schools to assist in the development of programs that incorporate the local Native American and historical heritage. Possible contributions might be lectures and school presentations, the development of text or displays to be used in the schools, and prizes for student development actions concerning archaeology and the protection of archaeological sites.

Displays concerning archaeological site protection could be mounted at the Newton Free Library and City Hall. The interpretive portion of this survey should be used as a basis for themes of archaeological importance to be used in educational programs. Funding through grants is available which helps program development of this nature.

The Newton Department of Planning and Development/ Newton Historical Commission should regularly sponsor public presentations concerning the archaeology of the City, and immediate vicinity, especially concerning successful preservation programs. Using the themes presented above, walking tours should be established for use by the schools and the general public.

There are many archaeology and history faculty members and graduate students who live in the area, and are associated with local universities and colleges who could be asked to speak, especially in conjunction with Archaeology Month in October of each year.



*UMass archaeologist uses ground penetrating radar to locate possible unmarked burials in the East Parish Burying Ground.*

Information about Archaeology Month can be obtained from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (617-727-8470).

An artifact identification session is a popular addition to presentations, encouraging the City's people to bring artifacts for identification. Through such events, many previously unrecorded sites can be reported to

the Newton Department of Planning and Development/Newton Historical Commission and added to the site files maintained by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. With increased public appreciation and awareness of archaeological sites and the City's history, future damage and looting may be reduced.



## Conclusions and Final Recommendations

The City of Newton contains a notable diversity of archaeological resources. These include sites occupied by Native Americans more than 8,000 years ago, as well as the homes of the men and women who lived in Newton in the earliest days of historic period settlement. The sites and the artifacts they contain offer a unique and immediate link to the past residents of the City. However, these archaeological resources are fragile and finite, where they have survived obliteration by natural and manmade forces.

In the future, the preservation of Newton's archaeological heritage will depend upon several variables:

- The importance of archaeological sites, and the centrality of the sites to the interpretation of Newton's history, must be recognized and appreciated by the City's residents, and passed on to future generations. Fortunately, many people in the community are interested in preserving evidence of the past, in the form of historical buildings, historic districts, and archaeological sites. The Newton Historical Commission, the Newton Historical Society, and the Newton Free Library are all actively involved in historic preservation and education.

- The City should adopt an ordinance that codifies an archaeological site protection plan, in order to require consideration of possible archaeological resources in areas of moderate to high archaeological potential where new construction is proposed. The ordinance would pertain to construction projects not already being reviewed under the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, or other federal and state regulations.

The objective would be to identify, preserve, or appropriately investigate the significant archaeological sites that still exist in the City. Under an archaeological site protection plan, City regulatory organizations responsible for review of construction permit applications would consider the possibility for significant archaeological resources to be disturbed by proposed development actions that exceed specific parameters of scope and size, specified in the ordinance.

If a development action exceeded specific parameters and would impact an archaeologically sensitive area, the regulatory organization would refer the permit application to the Newton Historical Commission for review. The Newton Department of Planning and Development/ Newton Historical Commission could then determine whether an archaeological survey was merited, and in consultation with the Massachusetts Historic Commission, would decide an appropriate scope of archaeological survey.

In the long term, an archaeological site protection plan would help the Newton community to achieve a balance between the

requirements of modern development, and the need to preserve and protect the valuable archaeological heritage of the City. The Newton Department of Planning and Development/Newton Historical Commission should continue its efforts to ensure that the maximum number of cultural resource management surveys are conducted, and such assessments will increase if an ordinance is adopted.

- Future archaeological research in Newton should not be limited only to cultural resource management surveys that are required for compliance purposes. While these investigations are important and produce valuable information, they generally are targeted at localized, arbitrary project areas (such as gas pipeline easements or small subdivisions), and thus are less likely to provide the level of insight into the past that is offered by research-oriented examinations.

Such examinations test hypotheses by conducting extensive excavation at a specific Native American or historical site, by sampling targeted locations across a broad area, or by synthesizing existing data obtained from a geographic subregion. The latter category of hypothesis-testing archaeological survey is much less common, but can be undertaken by an archaeological field school, professors and graduate students, and other qualified researchers.

- The inventory of archaeological sites in the City should be updated continuously as additional sites are recorded and researched. This information should be added to the City and state archaeological site files. Archaeological sites that have not been recorded cannot be protected. The present reconnaissance survey has recorded numerous additional Native American and historical sites in Newton, but the inventory is not exhaustive. The map indicating archaeological site potential, that has been provided by the City-wide reconnaissance survey, may be incorporated into the City's GIS database, and should be updated as new areas of disturbance or archaeological concern are identified.

- It is recommended that the City-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey report and site maps be kept in a secure location where they are easily accessible to members of the Newton Department of Planning and Development/ Newton Historical Commission, and other parties that require site information for management purposes. Such documents should be housed in a secure, climate-controlled, storage space, ideally within the Planning Department itself. Because these documents contain sensitive site information that has the potential to be misused by looters, access to the documents must be controlled. The map indicating archaeological potential that was provided to the Newton Department of Planning and Development may be made available to the public.



*Site of lower dam and paper mills, south of Pratt's Bridge, now Washington Street Bridge (top) and John Clark's Saw Mill Site (below).*



## Additional Reading

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Many of the ideas used in this report are derived from scholars and researchers who published in technical documents. Complete references are provided in the technical City-wide archaeological reconnaissance report submitted to the City by UMass Archaeological Services.