Newton's 19th Century Architecture: Newton Corner and Nonantum

Department of Planning and Development
Newton Historical Commission

NEWTON'S 19TH CENTURY ARCHITECTURE:

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Introduction

Through most of American history each new generation has inherited an environment built by its fathers and grandfathers. In recent times this pattern has been interrupted by the destruction of entire neighborhoods of older buildings, but for the most part we continue to live and work in surroundings that were constructed within the past 50 to 100 years. Designed to please a consumer whose tastes were quite different from our own, much of the architecture of America's past, particularly that of the 19th century, has been unappreciated, ignored, or simply misunderstood.

This guide to Newton Corner and Nonantum has been prepared as an introduction to the architecture of two of Newton's older villages, communities whose housing is primarily a product of the Victorian era. Included in this booklet are a survey of the areas' history, a brief guide to understanding architectural design and remodeling and repairing older buildings, and a review of the most common 19th century architectural styles.

The booklet is part of an ongoing project to identify and study Newton's architectural heritage. Under the Newton Historical Properties Survey, an inventory of approximately 1300 structures in Newton Corner and Nonantum was taken in 1976-1977. Based in part on information from the Newton's Older Houses series, covering the City's pre-1855 buildings and published by the Jackson Homestead, this inventory records the architectural style, date, significance and historical background of each structure in Newton Corner and Nonantum built prior to 1907. In addition, walking tour brochures of two neighbhorhoods in these communities have been published in conjunction with the project.

Several people have provided their time and assistance during the course of this project. They include Elsie Husher of the Newton Historical Commission, Duscha Scott and Dorothy Bates of the Jackson Homestead, the staff of the Newton Free Library, and Wayne Altree of Newton South High School, whose Local History class participated in the Newton Corner inventory. Fran Campbell of the Newton Housing Rehabilitation Fund, Robert Walker, Paula Barry, Nancy Russell, Alan Blazar and Patricia Trucher also helped out during various phases of the study. In addition, Arthur Krim's analysis of workers' housing in the Cambridge Historical Commission's Northwest Cambridge volume and George Stephen's Remodeling Older Houses have been valuable references in preparing the booklet.

Kathlyn Hatch
Newton Historical Properties Survey

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The City of Newton is a populous inner suburb located approximately eight miles from downtown Boston. Bordered on three sides by the Charles River, its eastern boundary lies contiguous to Brookline and the Brighton and West Roxbury districts of Boston. The City is bisected by several major expressways that link Boston with its western suburbs. Route 128, the metropolitan area's 1950's beltway, crosses its western perimeter, connecting with the Massachusetts Turnpike extension, which extends through Newton's northern communities. Another large arterial highway, Route 9, cuts across the southern section of the City.

Developed essentially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Newton is an attractive area of single-family homes, rolling hills, parkland and narrow residential streets. Its 13 villages, with localized shopping areas and individual social and physical attributes, give the City a more diverse character than most suburbs. The villages are a reflection of a much earlier settlement pattern, when Newton consisted of several small, decentralized farming and manufacturing communities. At the City's northeastern corner are the villages of Newton Corner, Newton's oldest settlement, and Nonantum, an early industrial center.

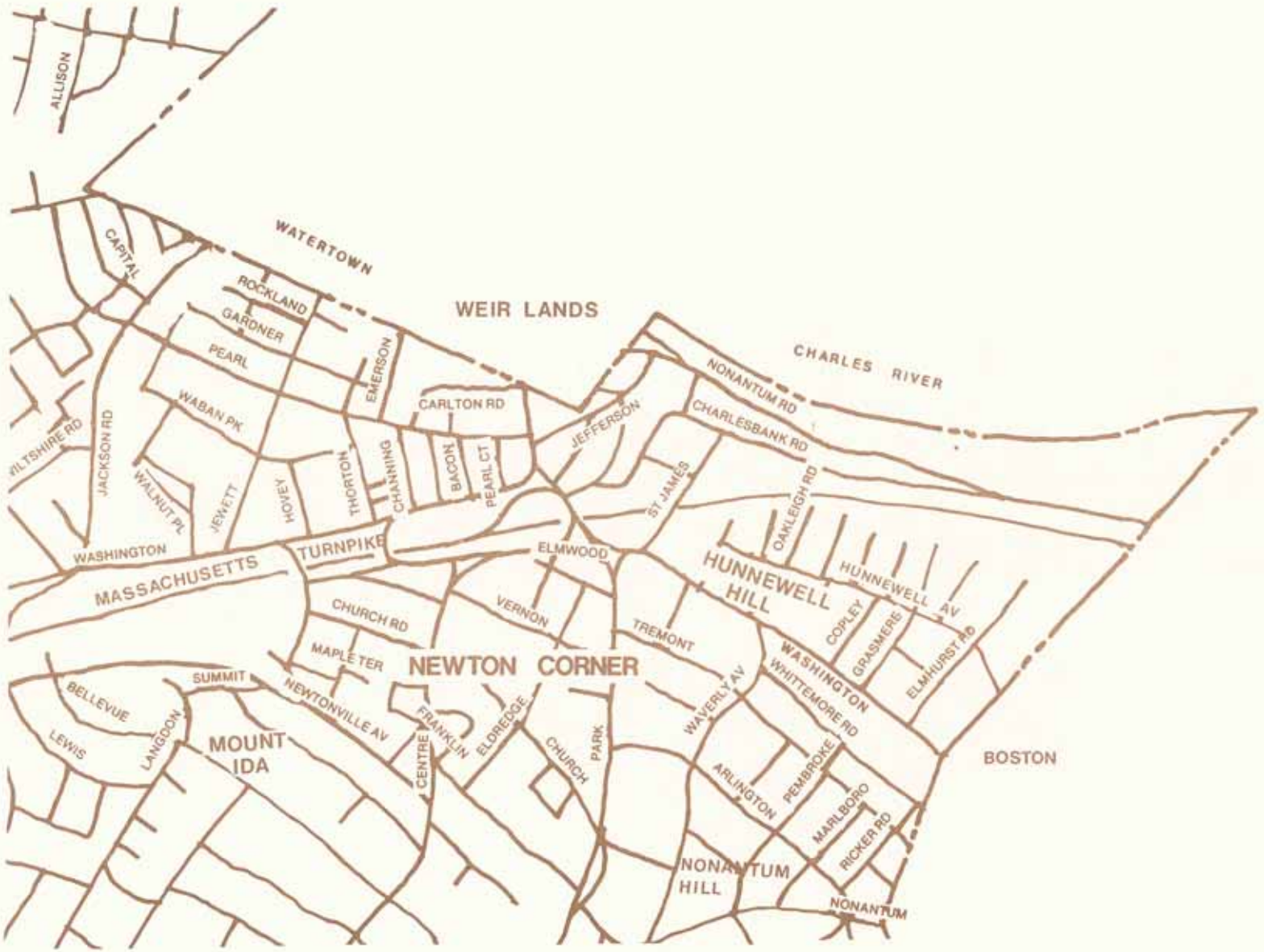


Fig. 1 Plan, Newton Corner

Newton Corner

Newton Corner, which has a population of approximately 6,000, is one of Newton's largest villages. The site of the City's first settlement, during the 19th century it became one of Boston's prestigious suburbs. The housing that survives from this period comprises one of Newton's most important concentrations of Victorian-era architecture.

The Village is located at the City's northeast corner, adjacent to Boston (Fig. 1). Its northern edge borders on the Charles River and a trapezoidal section of Watertown at the river's south bank. Known as the Weir Lands, this district was granted to Watertown for fishing grounds early in the 17th century and is named for the crude nets, or weirs, of the local fishermen.

Newton Corner's other boundaries, less clearly defined, derive from the area's physical features. Laundry Brook, which flowed along Jackson Road and is now underground, marks the western line of the village, and Mount Ida and Nonantum Hill separate it from Newton Centre at the south. Nonantum and Hunnewell Hills, along with Mount Ida, are the most important features of the area's varied, glacially-formed terrain. Exposed ledges of slate conglomerate stone, a legacy of the glacial period found in rocky outcrops throughout most of the district, provided foundation material for many of Newton Corner's pre-20th century buildings.

THE COLONIAL SETTLEMENT

For centuries Indians had been attracted to the Newton Corner district by the fertile fishing along the Charles River. Nonantum, a small settlement of the Massachusetts tribe, existed here before the arrival of English colonists in the early 1600's. In 1646 John Eliot, the famed "Apostle of the Indians," came to Newton Corner, winning over the local chieftain, Waban, and converting several members of his tribe to Christianity. Eliot established a small village of "praying Indians" at Nonantum Hill, which disbanded in 1651 and moved to Natick. Washington Street, then an Indian trail, was called the Natick Road until after the American Revolution. It passed near an important tribal council site in Natick, the place where Eliot's Christian converts had resettled. Although Indians lived here side by side with the colonists for little more than a decade, the names of Waban and Nonantum have survived to this day as common Newton place names.

Newton's first white settler was Deacon John Jackson, who arrived in 1639. Jackson's house stood on Washington Street near Waverley Avenue in Newton Corner. Known as Cambridge Village, at this time the area belonged to Newtowne, a Y-shaped colonial land grant that included sections of Arlington, Watertown, Belmont and several other towns. Cambridge, founded in 1631, was Newtowne's principal settlement.

Newton's first families were required by law to attend weekly church services, which meant a long journey to Cambridge each Sunday. Resenting this lengthy trip and often at odds with the Cambridge colonists, they split from Cambridge parish in the 1660's and built their own, more convenient meetinghouse here in Newton. The new church signaled a first step toward independence from Cambridge, which was accomplished in 1688. At this time the separate town of Newtowne was legally established, its name shortened through custom and common usage to Newton by the mid-1700's.

THE AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE

Newton Corner residents relied on farming for their livelihood until well into the 19th century. By the end of the 1600's the village, which consisted of a cluster of farmsteads at Washington Street and a few outlying farms, had been surpassed in population by Newton Centre. During this early period it was called Bacon's Corner, after Daniel Bacon, a tailor who settled here in the 1660's.

Very few houses survive from Newton Corner's agricultural era. Those that have not been changed beyond recognition include the Durant-Kenrick house (1732 ff.) and part of the Ricker farmstead (1833/1860) at 286 and 148 Waverley Avenue, and the Samuel Jackson, Jr. (1760 ff.) and Major Timothy Jackson (1809) residences at 137 and 527 Washington Street. Known as the Jackson Homestead, the Timothy Jackson house now serves as Newton's historical museum.

Farming had been the sole occupation of Newton Corner villagers during the 1600's, but in the following century the local economy broadened as Boston-bound cattle, stagecoaches and farm wagons from western Massachusetts formed a steady stream of traffic along Washington Street. A small village center grew up at the intersection of Centre and Washington Streets to serve the flow of travelers. In this era the settlement became known as Angier's Corner, after Oakes Angier, a local brewer and keeper of its most popular tavern.

By 1830 "Angier's Corner" had acquired a post office, several shops, and a cluster of homes at its main intersection. It remained, however, a small roadside waystation, essentially rural in character. The villagers' occupations had grown in diversity from the early 1700's and, in addition to the local tradesmen, the community could now boast of the famous hillside orchards of the Kenrick family and a few modest experiments with manufacturing conducted by the Jacksons and other would-be entrepreneurs.

THE RAILROAD SUBURB

In April, 1834 the Boston & Worcester Railroad, in an inaugural run to Newton, initiated a new, radically different era in Newton Corner's development. Describing the first minutes of this history-making event, a Boston onlooker wrote:

> Placed upon the track, [the train's] driver, who came with it from England, stepped upon the platform with almost the airs of a juggler, or a professor of chemistry, placed his hand upon the lever, and with a slight move of it, the engine started at a speed worthy of the companion of the "Rocket," amid the shouts and cheers of the multitude. It gave me such a start that my hair seemed to start from the roots, rather than stand on end.

The Meteor, and its sister locomotive, the Rocket, were the first regularly scheduled passenger trains in the Northeast. The railroad had been rerouted through Newton at the last minute, when William Jackson quickly secured a right-of-way through Newton Corner, Newtonville and West Newton after Waltham and Watertown had turned down the railroad company's initial proposal. The Boston & Worcester

line, later acquired by the Boston & Albany Railroad, operated four trains each day for a round-trip fare of 75 cents, accomplishing the Boston-Newton run at a then-astonishing pace of between 20 and 30 miles per hour.

The train's daily schedule allowed Boston's wealthier residents to escape from the crowded urban neighborhoods to a more pleasant setting, and at the same time retain their jobs in the city's downtown offices. The upper class had long maintained rural estates in Boston's outer villages, but with the introduction of the railroad those who had to work year-round could enjoy the healthy country air as well. In the first few years after the railway was built, Newton Corner enjoyed great popularity as a summer resort for Boston families. Nonantum House, a hotel that opened in 1837 near the site of the present post office, did a brisk business in vacationing city dwellers during the hot months of June, July and August.

The initial period of growth occurred between 1845 and 1875. By the latter date most of the village's street system had been laid out (Fig. 2). Boston commuters began building permanent homes in Newton Corner during the 1840's. Newton Corner's first suburban developments - Kenrick, Walnut and Waban Parks - were opened by the Kenrick and Jackson families. Laid out by Alexander Wadsworth with an innovative design for tree-lined oval parks ringed by small estates, lots in these developments were auctioned off in 1844-1845. Within 30 years the area's scenic hills and the outlying western neighborhood near Jewett Street were dotted with the wood-frame country villas and gardens of Boston's newly-rich upper middle class - large storeowners, manufacturers, brokers, wholesalers, and prosperous lawyers — as well as the homes of several local families who had made fortunes in real estate and railroad stock.

The train depot was erected on the south side of Washington Street, near Centre. It ranked among the most lucrative in the railway system, collecting 26,000 fares in 1866 alone. The Boston & Worcester Company had renamed the village Newton Corner in the 1830's. Later in the century, after a petition by local residents who felt the name insufficiently distinguished for their prestigious community, the depot sign was changed to "Newton." Although currently called Newton Corner to distinguish it from the rest of the City, for many inhabitants, and for the local post office, the village is still "Newton."

Several streets near the railroad station were laid out in the 1840's and 1850's. Richardson, Church, Bacon, Peabody, Channing and Carleton Streets, as well as the older Charlesbank Road neighborhood, underwent almost constant construction through the Civil War era. Developed much more intensively than the wealthy hillside districts, the village's central section was predominately middle class, a neighborhood of teachers, lawyers, salesmen, clerks, owners of small downtown stores, building contractors, and local shopkeepers who had prospered with the new trade. Irish workers, employed primarily in the construction trades and as maids and gardeners at the larger estates, built a small settlement near Gardner Street beginning in the 1850's.

Newton Corner's business district grew from a few wood-frame shops to a prosperous center of handsome brick blocks that housed the area's banks, offices

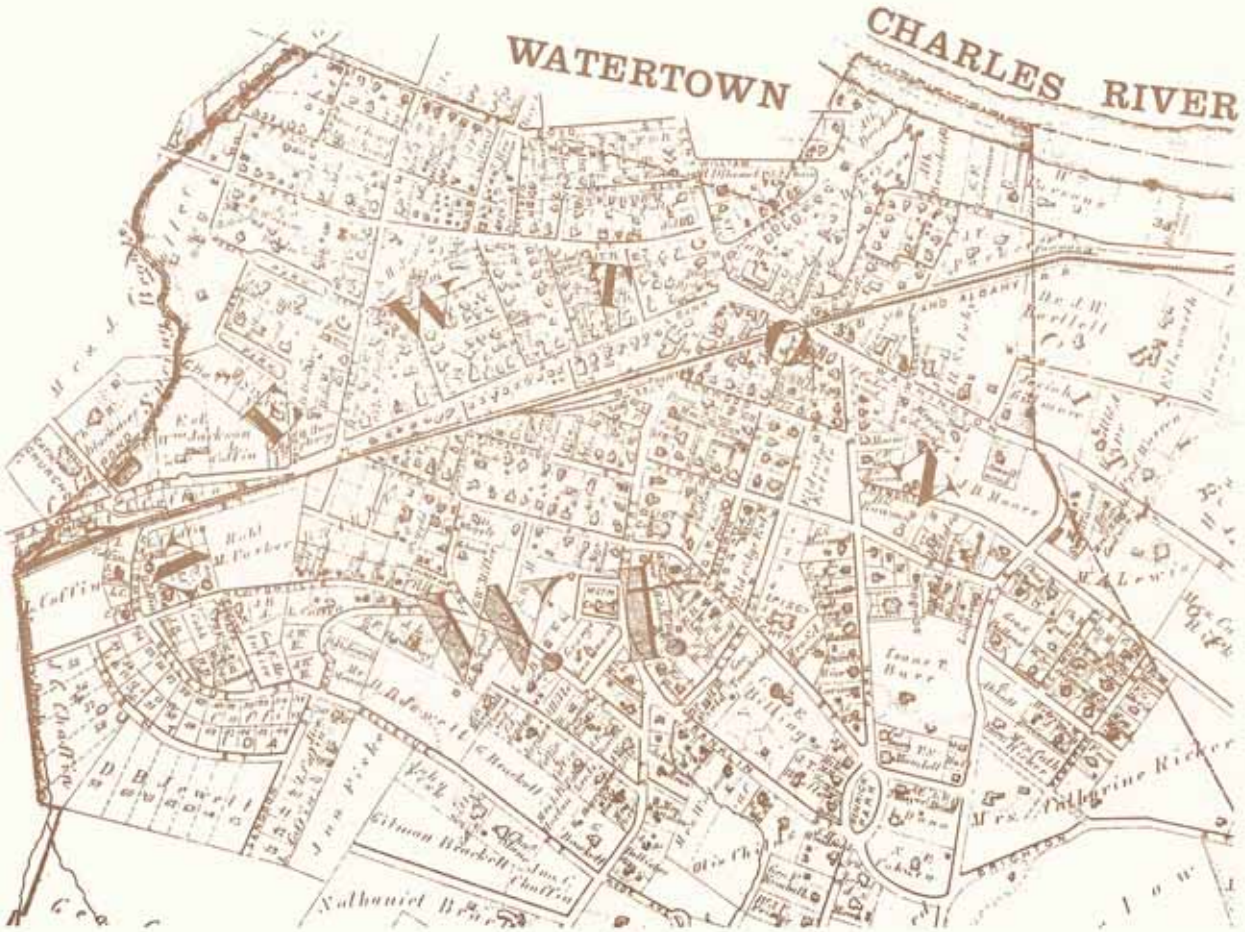


Fig. 2 Plan, Newton Corner (1874)

and largest stores, and a livery stable and warehouse district near the railway station. The business area, however, remained modest in scale, as most village residents preferred to shop in Boston. The last vestiges of the Civil War era commercial blocks were destroyed for the Massachusetts Turnpike in the early 1960's.

Religious, cultural and educational institutions flourished in Newton Corner during the decades between the 1840's and 1870's. Bigelow and Underwood, two of the most progressive schools of their era, were built during this period to accommodate the community's new suburban population. Eliot Congregational, its first building erected in 1845 at the corner of Centre and Church Streets, was Newton Corner's first church. Four other congregations, formed between 1850 and 1865, built elaborate brick and stone buildings near Centre Street and Farlow Park. These were Grace Episcopal (1872), Channing Unitarian (1881), now a Presbyterian congregation, Emmanuel Baptist (1885), designed by America's most famous 19th century architect, H. H. Richardson, and the Newton Corner Methodist Church (1897) by another well-known firm, Cram, Wentworth & Goodhue.

By the 1880's Newton Corner had grown to over 4,000 residents and accounted for one-quarter of the City's total population. It achieved a wide reputation as a pleasant, prosperous suburb, renowned for its attractive homes, gardens and new millionaire residents. Farlow Park, donated to the City by John Farlow, a wealthy railroad entrepreneur, is typical of the civic pride of this era. In the same decade, however, real estate prices began to soar. As pressure for new house lots increased, the older estates on Hunnewell Hill were broken up, farm lands parceled off, speculators built rows of rental housing, and hundreds of more transient middle and lower middle class tenants moved to the district.

THE STREETCAR SUBURB

The last major phase of growth in Newton Corner occurred between 1890 and 1920, an era that coincided with the introduction of streetcar lines to Boston. The nickel-fare trolleys, known as the "poor man's railroad," made the area accessible to many more city dwellers and brought a new influx of residents. By the 1920's virtually all of Newton Corner's available land had been absorbed and many of the remaining estates succumbed to the speculator's quest for more house lots. Tremont Street, with its central streetcar tracks and repetitive rows of of one- and two-family homes, is typical of the "streetcar" development that engulfed other Boston-area neighborhoods like Arlington and Watertown.

With the street railways and burgeoning population came the urbanization of Newton Corner, a process that halted abruptly around 1910. During the 1890's the business district had been substantially redeveloped in a massive municipal improvement project that included realigning its major streets and relaying the Boston & Albany railroad tracks below street grade. The village's large, light-colored brick commercial blocks, combining shops, offices and apartments, remain from this period. New apartment buildings were also constructed near the village center at the turn of the century. The most distinctive are The Marion at 457 Washington Street and Vernon Court at 490 Centre Street.

THE MODERN ERA

Residential development in Newton Corner slowed after 1920, primarily because by this time most of the community's available lots had been sold. The commercial district underwent a modest expansion during the 1920's, and again in the years just before and after the Second World War. Most of this new construction took the form of car showrooms and buildings for national chain stores.

Change in Newton Corner, however, occurred on a very small scale until the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension in the early 1960's. The turnpike, which follows the route of the old Boston & Worcester railroad tracks, necessitated the destruction of entire residential neighborhoods along Hunnewell Hill and Mount Ida. Its major impact was in the commercial area, where the Newton Corner interchange destroyed most of the village's business district and the traffic generated by the Pike has brought modern highway development — drive-in banks, small shopping centers and parking lots — to the remaining blocks. In an innovative plan for using the air rights over the turnpike roadway, the community acquired its first highrise, Gateway Center, in the late 1960's.

Nonantum

The village of Nonantum, with a population of over 5,000, is the most densely settled section of Newton. A compact, tightly-knit community of small cottages and two-family homes, the area developed in the mid- and late 19th century as a textile manufacturing center with a large ethnic population.

The Charles River, which forms the village's northern boundary (Fig. 3), played a key role in Nonantum's early industrial development. Watertown lies at its eastern edge, along with Jackson Road, a boundary shared with Newton Corner. Crafts Street, an 18th century thoroughfare, forms Nonantum's western border, with Washington Street at the southern end of the district.

Nonantum lies on a broad plain that slopes gently toward Washington Street from the banks of the Charles River. In early years its land area was covered with woodland, meadows and marshes. Silver Lake, a large spring-fed pond located between Nevada and Adams Streets, was for a long time the village's most important topographical feature. The lake, gradually filled in during the 20th century, once provided ice for the area's residents and recreation in the form of fishing, skating and swimming.

For almost two centuries Nonantum's population was too small and widely dispersed for the area to be considered a full-fledged village. Nicknamed "Tin Horn" in the 19th century after the piercing, early morning workcalls of its factories, the community was called North Village until the late 1800's, when the name Nonantum came into use.

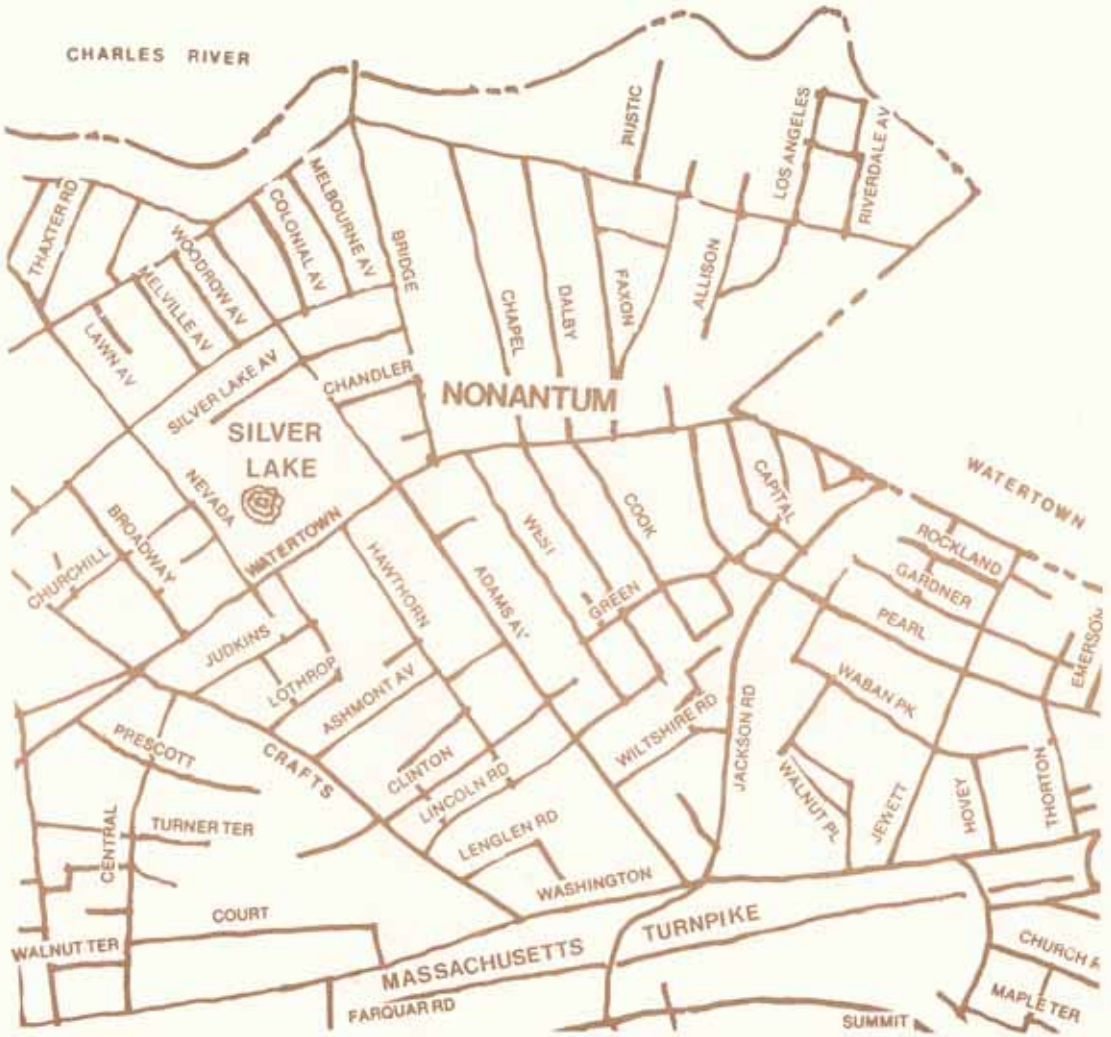


Fig. 3 Plan, Nonantum

Translated as "rejoicing", Nonantum was a 17th century Indian village in Newton Corner which has lent its name to several places in the northeast part of Newton, including Nonantum Hill, Nonantum Street and Nonantum Square, as well as the village of Nonantum. Although Silver Lake has nearly disappeared as a result of filling and development, many Nonantum residents refer to their community as "The Lake".

THE AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE

In the 1600's Nonantum belonged to part of a 600-acre tract of land owned by Thomas and Richard Park. Though farmed by the Park family, the area remained largely uninhabited until the 18th century. The Park farmstead, long since demolished, stood near the intersection of Bridge and California Streets on the south bank of the Charles River.

Nonantum was sparsely settled as late as 1830, when a few small farmsteads lined Watertown Street, its major thoroughfare, and farmers with larger land holdings settled in the outlying Crafts and California Street districts. Several of the community's street names recall these early settlers, including Adams, Crafts and Faxon Streets. Allison Park near the Charles River and Allison Street were subdivided from the James Allison property, one of the last farms in Nonantum. The Stearns house at 259 Watertown Street, and another small farmstead at 47 Bridge Street owned by the Bemis family, are the only farmhouses remaining from Nonantum's agricultural period.

THE INDUSTRIAL VILLAGE

Until about 1850 water was the only source of power for factory machinery and, as a consequence, virtually all mills before this time were located along fast-moving streams and rivers. Held back by dams, the water was carried by a canal system to large machine-operating wheels. Its flow was regulated by a gate, with the mill pond behind the dam providing a steady supply of power. The first mills ground flour for the colonists' bread and produced sawn timber for construction, but by the end of the 1700's water-powered factories had taken over the production of other kinds of time-consuming hand work, particularly the spinning and weaving of cloth.

David Bemis was the first to realize the potential of Nonantum's riverside location. Around 1780 he began construction of a dam, a bridge to Watertown, and a small water-powered mill on the Charles River at Bridge Street. His sons Seth and Luke expanded this enterprise, erecting larger factories on both the Newton and Watertown sides of the river, and produced, at various times, medicine, paper, glass, chocolate, cotton cloth and dyes in the family's mill complex.

The Bemises were among America's first entrepreneurs, small capitalists and inventive engineers whose modest operations required little cash outlay and a small number of workers. Their mills were sold in the mid-1800's to William Freeman and eventually acquired by Aetna Mills, a large woolen manufacturing concern. Aetna remained at the Bemis plant until well into the 20th century.

Seth Bemis, Jr., who made a fortune from his railroad and textile investments, remained in Nonantum after he sold the family's mills here. For a long time he was one of the area's major landowners. His mansion, built in the 1860's, still stands at 19-21 Bridge Street.

Thomas Dalby, an Englishman, founded a hosiery company on Chapel Street in the 1850's. This mill, which was bought out by the Nonantum Worsted Company after the Civil War, became the center of Nonantum's growing textile industry. Crippled by a national economic depression, Nonantum Worsted went bankrupt in 1896 and was bought out by the Saxony Worsted Company. As the textile industry declined during the late 1920's Saxony's sprawling steam-powered factory complex was subdivided into rental space for several smaller companies.

As large stock-based corporations led by Boston industrialists, both Saxony and Nonantum provided a contrast with the earlier, family-owned Bemis enterprise and a new phase in the village's industrial economy. With millions of dollars in capital expenditures, they extended the original Dalby factory until it covered most of the long block between Watertown and California Streets, and invested a large amount of money in designing and building their own machinery. The highly mechanized process of spinning long strands of of woolen yarn for the worsted cloth made here required over 600 workers at peak production periods, most of them unskilled machine operators.

The Silver Lake Cordage Company, a handsome brick mill that also employed several hundred operatives, was constructed in the 1860's on Silver Lake at Nevada Street. Braided industrial-gauge rope was manufactured here, as well as sash cord and trolley pulls. The company shut down its Nonantum operations in 1928 and, like many New England firms, relocated near the cheaper labor supply provided in the South.

NONANTUM'S ETHNIC POPULATION

The Irish were the first large immigrant group to settle in Nonantum. Driven from their homes in Ireland by potato famines and wholesale evictions by English landlords, between 1845 and 1855 some 35,000 Irishmen fled to Boston. In the decades spanning the Civil War period, well over 100 Irish families moved to Nonantum. Through the 1890's they continued to arrive in a steady stream, seeking work in the village's textile industry.

A few of Nonantum's first Irish settlers were employed as factory hands, but most apparently worked in building construction and as gardners and maids. Because they were the first foreign population to settle here, the Irish had a major impact on the village, building most of its housing and operating a large majority of its businesses. An Irish Catholic parish, St. Brendan's, was organized in the 1850's and replaced in 1873 by Our Lady Help of Christians.

The second wave of immigrants to make Nonantum their home were French-speaking Canadians. This group came in the 1880's and settled in the Dalby, Jasset and Faxon Street neighborhoods. As their arrival corresponded with an increased demand for unskilled labor, many found work right away in the local textile factories. In 1911 the French community founded its own Catholic parish, St. Jean's, on Dalby Street. The Church was relocated to Watertown Street in 1960.

Nonantum's Jewish population emigrated here from Eastern Europe beginning in the 1890's. Although

much smaller than the Irish and French groups, the Jewish community here was large enough to sustain a temple, Agudath Achim, which still stands at 168 Adams Street. Most of the early Jewish immigrants made their living as scrap dealers and shopkeepers.

Italians, who were also part of Nonantum's later wave of immigrants, first appeared around 1888. The influx of this group, however, occurred largely in the decades between 1900 and 1920. The village's Italian residents worked at first in the textile industry and were also employed in the construction trades. Nonantum is now predominately Italian and continues to function as a receiving area for newly-arrived Italian immigrants. The village currently has the highest percentage of foreign-born residents in Newton.

By 1900 Nonantum had a large foreign population, crowded living conditions, and a high proportion of the City's poor. Often working with city officials, several charitable organizations, local residents and Newton women's clubs founded social welfare programs for the community. Typical of the new interest in serving the poor during the so-called American Progressive Era at the turn of the century, these services included English language classes, health clinics, athletic and recreation clubs, and instruction in cooking, sewing and the industrial arts. The Nonantum Vacation School was a model program, as was the Stearns School Centre, which employed a full-time social worker and operated the first school-sponsored multi-service center in the country. Erected in 1907-1908 on the old Stearns farm, the school housed the most elaborate - to that date - educational facilities in Newton.

North Congregational Church, founded as á mission society in 1861, was an early, somewhat different charitable project. Formed by Samuel Lowry, its first pastor, the church was supported by several of Newton Corner's older wealthy families. The land for its Chapel Street site had been donated by Thomas Dalby and the cost of the congregation's handsome stone building (1873) underwritten by members of the Eliot Congregational Church in Newton Corner. It is currently occupied by a Baptist congregation.

NONANTUM'S DEVELOPMENT

Before the Irish arrived, Nonantum's street system had been confined to the small network of Watertown, Bridge, California, Chapel and Nevada Streets. By 1875, however, many new streets were laid out and the area was gradually built up with the homes of the village's new immigrant families (Fig. 4).

Most of Nonantum's land had been owned by Yankee farmers, who sold off their holdings in large parcels, or in a few cases, developed the property into individual house lots. Although the local factories participated to a limited extent, and a few real estate investment companies were formed, on the whole the Irish were responsible for the development of Nonantum. As homeowners, landlords, shopkeepers and carpenter-builders, they left a mark on the community's physical appearance that remains almost intact to the present day.

The Irish bought the most desirable lots first, leaving long stretches of vacant land on most of the area's streets. In an 1889 account, Nonantum

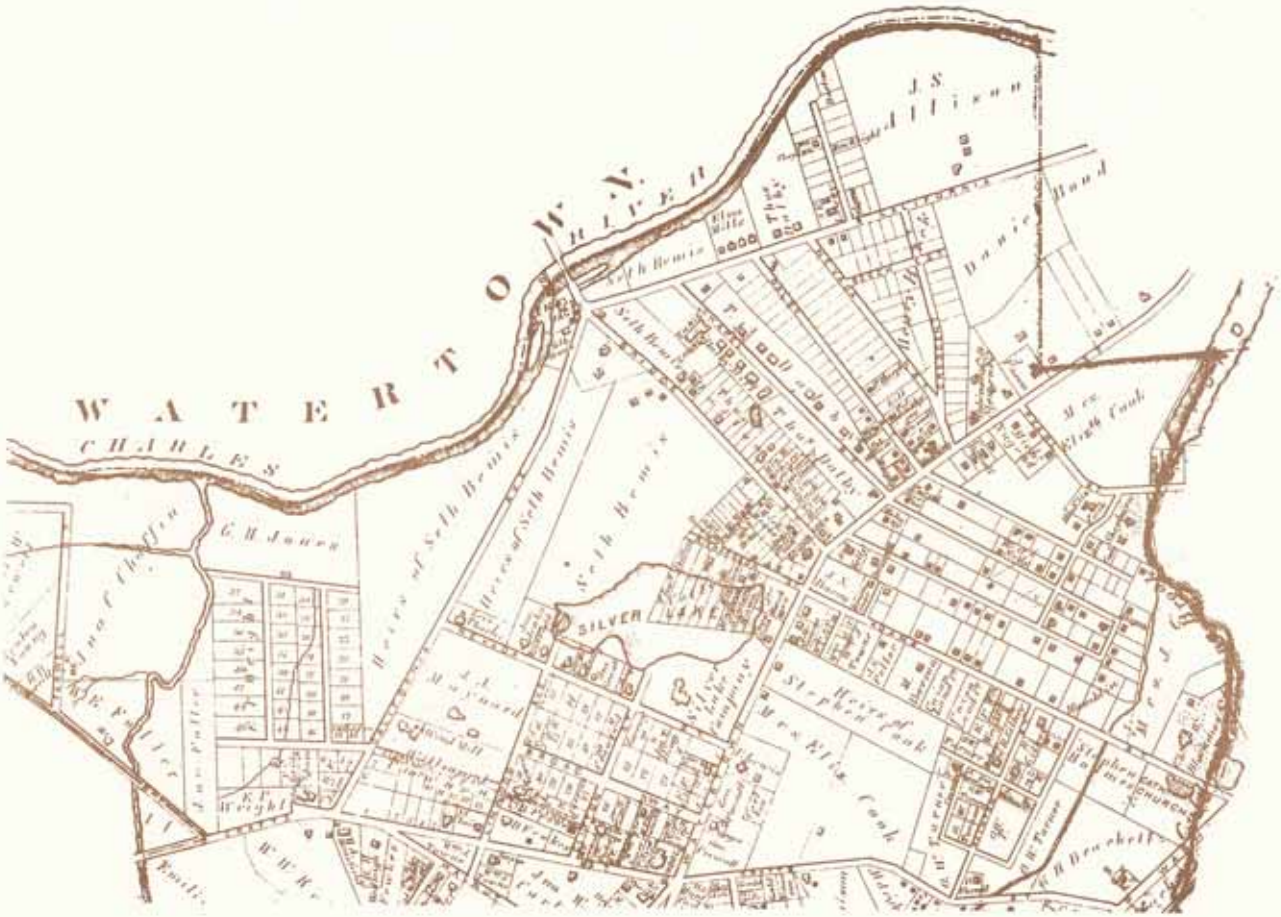


Fig. 4 Plan, Nonantum (1874)

was described as a manufacturing community that "straggles rather widely over the generous plain, and lacks the cohesion which a few more years may give it, but the houses are neat and comfortable, and the evidences of modest plenty appear on all sides." At this time both California and Crafts Streets were scenic rural lanes and a large wooded section of upper Bridge Street, owned by the Bemis family, was completely undeveloped.

In the 1880's and 1890's a land boom occurred in the village as large numbers of factory workers moved into the community. Real estate prices soared, and as a result most new construction between 1890 and 1910 took the form of two-family housing. Court developments, erected by Michael Quirk along Adams and Green Streets, also appeared in this period. Designed as small cul-de-sacs, the courts were laid out with four to eight narrow houses on a single, 36,000 square foot lot. Many of these small court dwellings were bought by Nonantum's first Italian immigrants.

The community's business district grew up at the intersection of Bridge and Watertown streets in the 1860's. It spread gradually along Watertown Street, and, during the population boom of 1880-1910 was largely rebuilt and expanded. Much of the village shopping area, though greatly remodeled, dates from this period.

THE MODERN ERA

New development in Nonantum occurred in the village's northwestern section during the post-World War I era. The Bemis family, which held most of the last undeveloped land, sold their holdings along California and the northern end of Bridge Street around 1910. Nearly all of this area was built up between 1915 and 1940. New construction for housing, warehouses and industry also took place on landfill at Silver Lake.

In recent years the village commercial district has undergone some redevelopment in the form of gas stations and modern stores. Most of Nonantum's building stock, however, dates from the period between 1860 and 1910. Its population and social institutions are now largely Italian, although segments of the older Irish and French-speaking communities remain.

II. Looking at Architecture

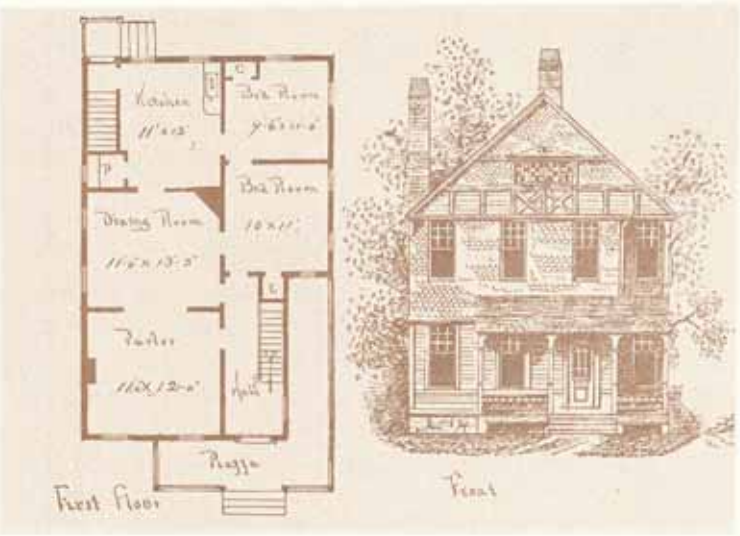


Fig. 5 House Plan, *Palliser's New Cottage Architecture* (1887)

The designs for the vast majority of houses in Newton Corner and Nonantum were the product of local builders and house carpenters. Architects produced only the most complex of the area's buildings, its churches, large commercial blocks and elaborate residences.

This is not to imply that the local carpenter-builder was incapable of performing work that exhibited a relatively high level of sophistication. Essentially a craftsman, he was highly competent in practical matters like framing systems, which during the 19th century encompassed not only the basic internal structure of a building but also mastery of the complex roofline shapes and curving projections of the Victorian era.

The builder participated fully in the design process. In addition to new developments in framing technology, he was required to absorb a rapid succession of architectural styles, adjusting them to both the taste and pocketbooks of his clients. To accomplish this he borrowed from designs that had been successful for other builders or consulted an architectural pattern book (Fig. 5). These handbooks of sample floor plans, house designs and ornamental trim for the most popular styles were widely published by architects and master builders throughout the 19th century. Often a builder and potential homeowner would review these books together, selecting elements from several illustrations to be incorporated into a new design.

Many houses in Newton Corner and Nonantum were custom built in this manner, with the owner playing a role in the design process. More common, however, was the builder's role as entrepreneur, in which he bought a single lot, erected a house to his own plans, and sold it, using the proceeds to initiate the cycle again. This highly individualistic system provided a steady source of employment for the local population and accounts for the large number of workers in the building trades in both Nonantum and Newton Corner. In the early 1890's there were over 200 carpenters and masons living in these communities.

Groups of lots were developed by a speculator, often a well-to-do businessman who hired a carpenter to construct a set of similar houses for later sale. This practice was more common in Newton Corner than Nonantum, where the large resident population of carpenters preferred to work individually or in partnerships on a small scale.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Creating a house design involved a complex process that included a number of limiting factors. For example, economic constraints imposed by the income of the client or potential buyer, as well as the availability and cost of materials, reduced the design options for the builder and homeowner. In addition, speculators and builders who constructed housing for an unknown buyer were restricted to conservative designs, limiting their capital risk by adhering to a few, already popular styles that would find ready acceptance among potential homeowners.

Cultural factors also played a determining role in the exterior appearance and interior arrangement of a house. In every age and civilization there have been shared perceptions of how a home should look and how its should function. Though taste in architecture is tied to personal experience, education and social status, cultural factors strongly influence the collective set of images of what is felt to be an appropriate or beautiful house in a particular era. During the 19th century preferences in architectural design were closely linked with a series of changing fashions, or styles.

The kinds of rooms a house should have were similarly culturally determined. Victorian homeowners, for example, had a more formal attitude toward outsiders than modern families. In the 19th century entertaining space was often divided into a formal parlor reserved for visitors and a separate sitting room for family intimates. These two functions were combined during the 20th century to form the modern living room.

Given both cultural and economic constraints, the designer could manipulate the physical elements of the house — its walls, openings and roof area — to express his own biases and those of his clients. The size of the parts of a building and their relationships to one another, the use of different forms and shapes, and the amount and placement of the ornamental trim are all directly related to its physical appearance. By examining the choices that went into designing a 19th century house we can have a better understanding of the final result. Following is a step-by-step analysis of the various components of the design process.

House Forms

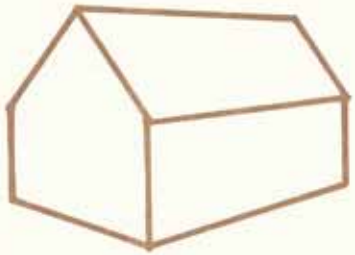


Fig. 6

The overall form of a house is most often expressed in the simple geometry of a rectangular or square block (Fig. 6).

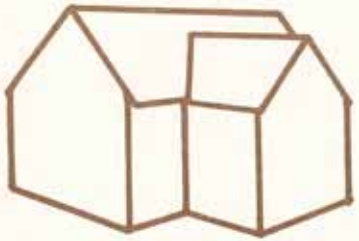


Fig. 7

This basic shape can be made more complex by adding a secondary form, or wing, to the sides or back of the house (Fig. 7).

Fig. 8

When there is more than a single wing, the arrangement of forms can be symmetrical, with balancing wings on either side of the main block (Fig. 8).

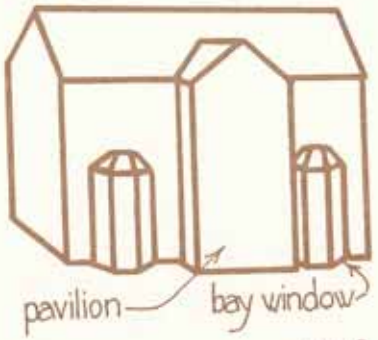


Fig. 9

Another method of arriving at a more involved house form is to add shallow projections such as a center pavilion or bay windows to the main block. These are placed symmetrically in the example (Fig. 9).

Fig. 10

By the mid-1800's houses were designed with asymmetrical forms of varying sizes and shapes. Favored in the Victorian period, these complex designs were called "picturesque" because of their irregular, dramatic silhouettes (Fig. 10).

Plans

A plan is essentially a map of a building, drawn looking from above as if the walls had been sliced through. It shows the arrangement of the rooms, the location of the stairway and hall, and the placement of the doors and windows.

Fig. 11

In general, boxy buildings with geometrical shapes will have simple plans (Fig. 11). Shown opposite is a typical first-floor room arrangement for houses of this type. This plan is symmetrical, with a central hall and rooms on each side.

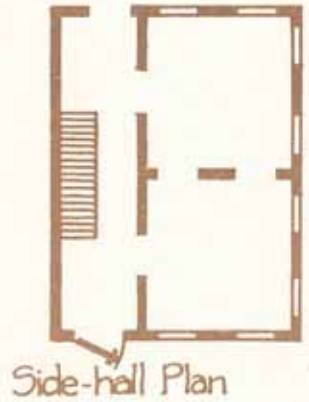


Fig. 12

The side-hall plan was adopted for the long, narrow houses of the mid-1800's. Because of the short front walls in these buildings, the stairhall was moved from a center position to the side, with the two main first-floor rooms placed back-to-back (Fig. 12).

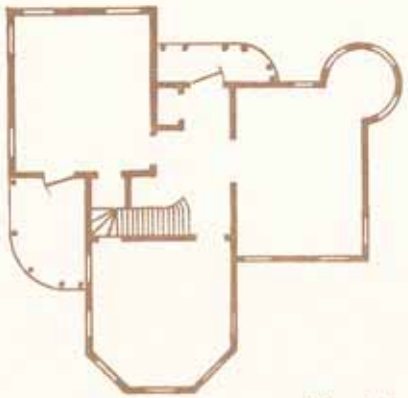


Fig. 13

In picturesque designs, and in large complex buildings, room shape and size varies and the interior spaces follow a complicated, asymmetrical pattern (Fig. 13). The internal room divisions can rarely be guessed from looking at the exterior and it is easier to become lost once inside.

Walls and Openings

The ratio of solids to voids, or the extent of the blank, neutral wall area between the punched-in window openings, makes a difference in the appearance of a house.

Fig. 14

In the example at the left (Fig. 14), there are four windows, grouped symmetrically on either side of the door. The number of windows allows for only a small section of wall space between each opening.

Fig. 15

An asymmetrical arrangement (Fig. 15) of two windows on one side, with a single window flanking the door, illustrates a variation in window/wall ratio that produces a quite different effect.

Fig. 16

Size can also govern the appearance of a building's facade (Fig. 16). The window at the right assumes much more importance in this design because its opening is larger.

Fig. 17

Windows in the 19th century held standard sizes of glass, kept in place by narrow strips of wood, or sash bars. Until the 1840's six panes in each section of the window were used (6/6 sash), with 2/2 division until the end of the 19th century, when modern 1/1 sash was introduced. The number of sash bars and window panes makes an impact on the overall effect of the design, as can be seen in the contrast between the 2/2 sash of the mid-1800's and the modern undivided window with plate glass (Fig. 17).

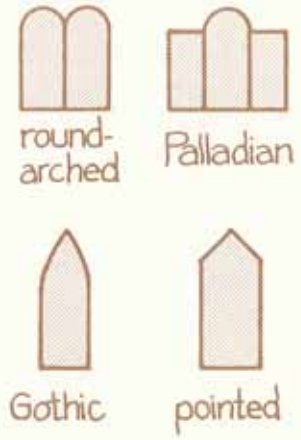


Fig. 18

In the 19th century windows assumed several shapes in addition to the standard rectangular form (Fig. 18). Often displayed in a prominent postion, such as above the main entrance, these windows were an important decorative feature. They were used sparingly because of the time and expense involved in special framing for the opening and in cutting the glass.

Materials

Wood, by far the most abundant and inexpensive building material of the 19th century, was used in virtually all Newton Corner and Nonantum residences of this period. It appeared in the internal structural system, as a weatherproof skin for the exterior, and as ornament throughout the building.

In the early 1800's wood was fashioned by relatively primitive saws into linear shapes, used horizontally for clapboards and in flat boards and molding strips for decoration. With the introduction of more complex woodworking machines in the mid-19th century, thousands of board feet of intricate wood trim were easily produced in a variety of fanciful scalloped, scrolled, curved and twisted shapes.

Wood has several properties that relate directly to a building's appearance. It is an easily-worked, light material that conveys none of the solidity and feeling of permanence found in brick or stone. Porous and organic, wood lacks the shiny surface quality of slate and the precision of man-made synthetic materials. To withstand the weather, it has to be treated with a preservative, or stained or painted, thus offering a choice in finishes and color schemes. And finally, wood is an essentially rigid material, best suited in construction for rectilinear forms. With complex framing it can be shaped into a circular contour, but this is more easily achieved in a malleable medium like metal or plastic.

Roofs

Five roof types were standard in the 19th century: gable, jerkin, gambrel, hip and mansard. Wood shingles had been the most common roof covering early in the 1800's, but by mid-century slate came into general use.

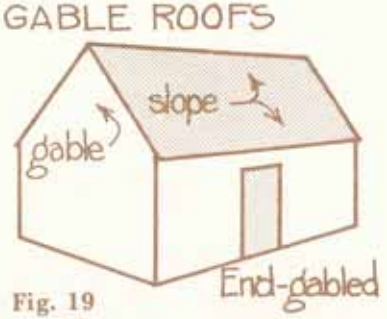


Fig. 19

Popular throughout the 19th century and very common, the gable roof (Fig. 19) has two slopes that meet at a peak and a gable at each end. The position of the gables is of major importance to a building's design. If the gable appears at the sides of a house, it is said to be end-gabled.

Fig. 20

Front-gabled houses had a quite different appearance (Fig. 20). They were used frequently with the side-hall plan (Fig. 12).

Fig. 21

The jerkin roof is closely related to the gable form, but has a triangular, backward slanting front and rear slope (Fig. 21).

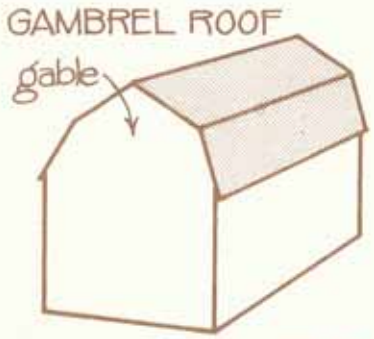


Fig. 22

Barnlike in shape, the gambrel roof has two slopes, broken into double sections, and gables (Fig. 22). It was popular during the late 1800's.

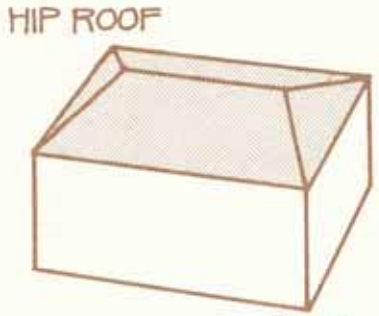


Fig. 23

The hip roof has four slopes and no gables (Fig. 23). It was used in the early 1800's and reappeared at the end of the century.

Fig. 24

A two-part hip roof, the mansard often has curving lower slopes (Fig. 24). Its heyday was between 1860 and 1880, during the so-called Mansard style.

Fig. 25

The proportions as well as the form of a roof can change the character of a house. A prominent, steep roof will dominate a design (Fig. 25), just as a low roof can assume much less importance in relation to the rest of the building (Fig. 26).

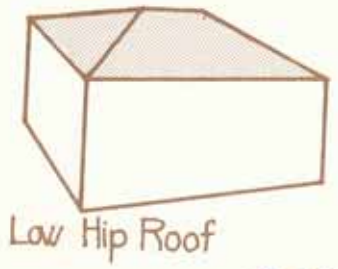


Fig. 26

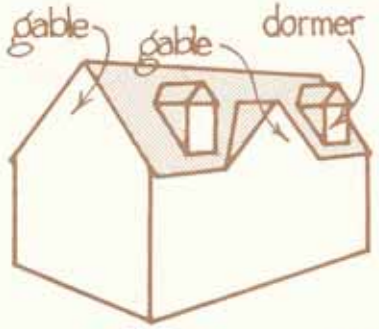


Fig. 27

The complexity of a roof corresponds to the grouping of forms in the body of the house. A picturesque house with a complex plan will also have a complex roofline. Decorative gables, or large triangular areas similar to the ends of a two-sloped roof, and dormers can add to the complexity of the roof shape (Fig. 27).

Ornament

Ornament is an essential part of a building's design, not just an afterthought. The type and amount of trim was dictated by a building's architectural style, as well as by its cost, size and pretensions.

Fig. 28

Ornament can be used in several ways. For example, it defines the meeting points between the walls, roof area and openings (Fig. 28). Decorative trim at these key locations includes the cornice at the eaves, cornerboards and moldings at the doors and windows.

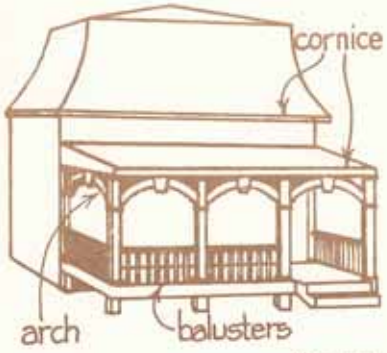


Fig. 29

Decoration is also concentrated at a building's most important design features. As an extension of the facade, the porch (Fig. 29) played an essential role in 19th century houses, as well as in the lifestyle of their occupants. In modest houses the porch often received the only display of fancy wooden detail. Porches were usually ornamented with curving posts, wooden arches, and railings with rows of balusters.

Fig. 30

Ornate trim was often applied as the final, individualistic signature to a design. This ornament is what sets 19th century architecture apart from the modern tract house. Common forms are vergeboards, or narrow decorative borders along the roof eaves, brackets, and window caps (Fig. 30).

Fig. 31

Decorative wall coverings were sometimes applied to the exterior of a building to enliven this essentially neutral area. The repetitive rows of clapboards perform this function to some extent, but elaborate decoration such as patterned wood shingles, long flat boards laid in various designs (stickwork) and vertical board-and-batten siding play a more crucial role in the design (Fig. 31).

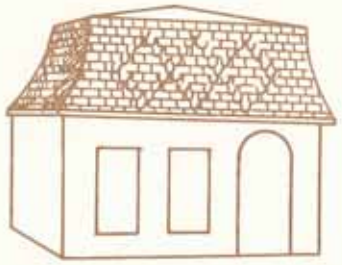


Fig. 32

In slate-covered roofs the individual slates were cut into decorative shapes and laid in intricate patterns, in much the same manner as wood shingles (Fig. 32). Patterned slate became a common feature of the mansard roof form and sometimes appeared in several colors.

SUMMARY

The selective, deliberate process of combining materials, forms, proportions and decoration produced an architectural statement that reflected a building's times, its occupants and its designer. Easily perceived at the time the house was built, this composite message is often not as clear to its modern readers.

Remodeling or repairing an older house, which requires a great deal of care, should respect the basic principles that went into its design. Several general rules to keep in mind are listed below. Many of these guidelines can hold as well for restoring a building to its original character.

If You Change Your House...

In general, original materials should be conserved wherever possible. Often selective patchwork will serve perfectly well, especially in the case of decorative trim, deteriorated shingles or broken slates.

Let the original building material be your guide in selecting replacement parts. Wood was used in the vast majority of older houses. It has special properties entirely different from brick, composition stone, shiny metals and synthetics, as described in the above section on materials (p. 20).

OPENINGS

The number of windows, as well as their dimensions, sets up a deliberate, balanced juxtaposition of openings and solid wall areas that should be retained at least on the front part of the house. The size of the panes and sash bar divisions of 19th century windows also played an important role in the appearance of a house (Fig. 17).

WALLS

The type of wall covering is important to a building's appearance. Clapboards, the most popular choice of the 19th century, had a thin, three- to five-inch exposure. When laid in a repetitive horizontal pattern, the clapboards established a specific texture to the wall surface. Eight-inch sizes of aluminum and vinyl synthetic siding destroy this rythm, alter the wall texture and significantly change the character of the house.

Wood shingles give a building an informal appearance, especially when they are stained rather than painted. Patterned shingling and decorative stickwork was applied as part of a complex design scheme and should be kept if at all possible. (See Fig. 31.)

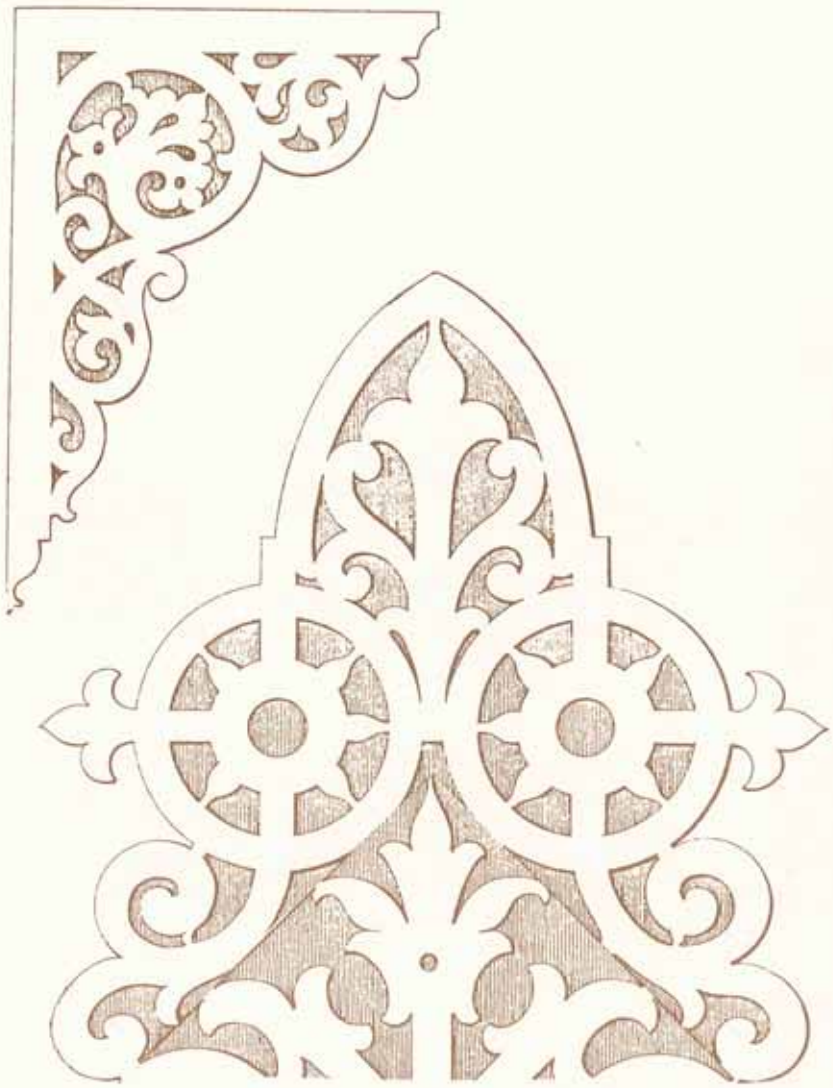
DECORATIVE TRIM

Moldings and other trim that outline the openings, corners and roof areas of the house are absolutely essential to a building's character. Small-scale trim like brackets and "gingerbread" sets a particular house apart from its neighbors and as such is rarely an expendable part of the design.

COLOR

Paint color is a matter of taste. Historically, early 19th century houses were painted white with dark shutters; later houses (1840-1890) had strong but dusky colors (dark red and green/grey/olive/tan and ochre) and contrasting trim in lighter or darker tones. Large ornate buildings of the 1880's were painted with up to eight different colors. During the last decade of the 19th century pastel shades (beige/light yellow/light green/light blue) with dark shutter colors and white trim came into vogue.

One general rule with regard to color is that dark-shaded materials emphasize the roof area of the house, while light-colored or variegated asphalt shingles tend to make the roof disappear. After 1830, in all 19th century architectural styles the roof was meant to play a prominent role and therefore should be dark in color.



III. An Architectural Guide

The villages of Newton Corner and Nonantum are both distinguished in the variety and quality of their residential architecture. With respect to early workers' cottages and double houses in Nonantum, and certain styles of suburban architecture in Newton Corner, these areas display a consistent level of quality that is significant, and largely unrecognized, within the context of Boston's metropolitan area. The two communities present contrasting architectural statements, reflecting their differing historical backgrounds and patterns of development.

Located at an important water-power site on the Charles River, Nonantum grew as a small industrial village and receiving area for a series of immigrant populations attracted by employment in the local textile mills. Its residential architecture was thus related to the needs of an essentially working class community. Built on small, inexpensive lots, the housing in Nonantum was constructed by local carpenters for a stable population of homeowners that included mill workers, skilled craftsmen and small shopkeepers. The closely-spaced dwellings of its many neighborhoods are largely a product of the late 19th century. Earlier in century most of the small cottages of Nonantum's residents had been strung along the community's major thoroughfares (Adams, Bridge, Watertown and California Streets) and its semi-rural side streets.

The area's housing represents a building tradition that developed outside the mainstream of 19th century architectural design. It responded slowly, if at all, to changes in architectural fashion and was linked instead to the ingenuity of Nonantum's builders, and to the income levels and lifestyles of its inhabi-

tants. Nonantum's architecture is essentially an urban version of the backwoods farmhouse, mountain cabin and other rural folk dwellings referred to as vernacular architecture, a popular, tradition-oriented "language of the people" expressed in built form.

Newton Corner had a more mixed population that included several levels of society. Although most of its residents were native born, there was a small settlement of Irish immigrants in the Gardner Street area that followed the same conservative building traditions found in Nonantum. Other segments of Newton Corner's population, including prosperous local businessmen and especially the Boston commuter, however, were notably susceptible to the current fashions in architecture. Developed primarily between 1840 and 1910, the village's housing stock provides a good illustration of the rich variety of architectural styles that characterize this period.

Linked to Boston by a commuter rail line, Newton Corner was suburban in scale and setting. The suburb was a new development of the mid-1800's, a small town tied through its inhabitants to the aspirations, values and lifestyle of a sophisticated urban center, yet in ambience and appearance similar to a country village. As such it presented a new kind of architectural problem that demanded a building type more ostentatious than a small town residence, but smaller than a country estate and more rural in feeling than the city's brick rowhouses.

The typical suburban house was wood frame in construction, like its country neighbors, yet designed with an imposing street facade and ostentatious front entrance. Its generous lot was planted with ornamental gardens and specimen trees in a small-scale imitation of the rural retreats of the very wealthy. By the end of the 19th century the larger suburban gardens had succumbed to pressure for new development and most substantial housing of this later period was built on comparatively small lots.

A trend toward picturesque architecture, first appearing in the 1840's, coincided with the evolution of a new suburban house type. Featuring a dramatic set of images that included imposing, jagged silhouettes, prominent rooflines and a wealth of ornate wooden decoration, "picturesque" architecture first appeared in the large country estates of the scenic Hudson River Valley. Newton Corner's newly-rich Boston commuters admired the picturesque style, but preferred smaller and less dramatic, though not less ostentatious, versions for their own hillside residences.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

The term "style" in architecture refers to a classification of the characteristic features of buildings erected in a certain period. Architectural style is a reflection of the society that produced it, expressing the philosophy, aspirations, ideals and intellectual currents of a particular cultural era. An understanding of stylistic trends can give an indication of contemporary popular taste, the context of an individual homeowner in his times, the approximate date of a building or the patterns of development in a specific neighborhood.

Each style had its own system of ornament, a distinct vocabularly that included not only decorative detail but also the proportions of a building's parts as they relate to the design of the whole. In different styles, for example, the roof could be low and insignificant, or dominate the entire composition.

New styles often borrowed several elements from their predecessors. A transition period of five to ten years that included features of both was common, as designers and their clients grew accustomed to the latest style. Often the decorative detail of a new fashion was first tried on the inside of a house, with the exterior design completely in keeping with the older, more familiar forms. In some cases a much earlier building was remodeled in a new style, or a porch and different ornamental trim added to bring it up to date.

Underlying the sequential development of 19th century styles were several basic trends. Historicism, or an interest in the architecture of an earlier period, was a predominant characteristic of 19th century architecture. This was particularly true in the Victorian era — roughly corresponding to the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) — when a succession of styles evoked a highly interpretive, often romantic view of the past. Historicism began in America with an interest in the classical temples of ancient Greece, waned briefly in the 1880's with the more imaginative, less historical designs of the Queen Anne and Shingle Style, and reemerged at the end of the century with an idealized version of American colonial architecture.

Another trend, which came full circle as it developed over the century, was a gradual change in the massing, or assemblage of forms, in residential architecture. The compact, crisply-defined outline of the early 1800's gave way in the period between 1840 and 1890 to more picturesque designs with broken silhouettes and a complex array of competing shapes. In the late 19th century house forms reverted back to the earlier, self-contained rectilinear building types.

Most styles were imported from England, reaching this country through the enthusiasm of the European traveler, the architect who studied abroad, or architectural magazines and books. New fashions were first experimented with in large, sophisticated urban centers like Boston, and then gradually proceeded in a pattern of geographical dispersion to the smaller cities, the towns and finally the rural farming areas. As Newton Corner's population became increasingly Boston-oriented, the usual five- to fifteen-year time period between a style's introduction and acceptance here diminished.

In a similar orderly progression, architectural styles followed a sequence tied to socio-economic status. Generally new architectural fashions sifted down through the classes, growing less complex as housing became more modest until at the workingman's level they were recalled by a single ornamental feature, such as the wooden bracket, if acknowledged at all.

A description of the nine architectural styles most prevalent in Newton Corner, with illustrations of representative examples of both the more complex and simpler local interpretations of these styles, follows. Vernacular housing, which developed apart from stylistic trends, is treated separately in a section on workers' dwellings in Nonantum and Newton Corner.

Federal 1790-1830

To many people the Federal style represents a high point in American architecture, a period of superior grace, refinement and clarity in design that expressed the ideals of the new American republic. It stands, in any event, as an antithesis to the parade of fanciful, ornate architectural styles that were to follow later in the 19th century.

Like most American architectural styles until the 1880's, the Federal style was imported from Great Britain, where it had been called the Adamesque. Robert Adam (1728-1792), a Scottish architect and enthusiastic student of Roman culture, chose the country estates of the Roman upper classes as a model for his designs, reproducing their delicate, graceful ornament and oval, hexagonal and semicircular room shapes in his plans for English manor houses. A similar style found favor on the continent in Louis XVI's court and the drawing rooms of Paris.

Charles Bulfinch (1763-1844) brought Adamesque architecture to Boston in the early 1790's after an extended tour abroad. Known in this country as the Federal style, the new vogue for Bulfinch-influenced designs spread to the prosperous ports of the Eastern seaboard, and then through carpenters' handbooks to the towns and farmsteads of America's hinterland. Newton Corner has a distinguished example of Federal architecture in the Jackson Homestead (Fig. 33), built in 1809. The Jackson residence now serves as the City of Newton's Museum and Historical Center.

Although less sophisticated than urban Federal period buildings, the Jackson Homestead displays several salient features of the Federal style. Designed with an absence of distracting projections, it has a self-contained, rectilinear form and a low, inconspicuous hip roof. This roof type, a hallmark of the Federal period, serves to emphasize the boxy shape and solid wall areas of the house. The arrangement of openings on the facade is strictly symmetrical, with the outer windows grouped in pairs, and a center window placed in line with the entrance. In this era of hand craftmanship ornament was confined to a series of moldings at the cornice and windows.

Fig. 33 The Jackson Homestead
527 Washington Street

Federal period doorways were beautifully proportioned and that of the Jackson Homestead is no exception (Fig. 34). Its fanlight, a curved window that spans the width of the entrance, is decorated with delicate, fan-shaped ornament. At each side of the door are narrow windows, or sidelights, that allowed light into a central hallway. This combination of fanlight and sidelights at the doorway is one of the chief components of Federal period design.

Fig. 34 Doorway,
The Jackson Homestead

Greek Revival 1830 - 1860

The Greek Revival style flourished between 1830 and the Civil War, a time span that coincided with a period of major growth in Newton Corner. All of the commercial blocks and most of the elaborate residences built in this style have been torn down. A cluster of several good examples of the Greek Revival, however, remains at Church and Centre Streets, an area developed shortly after the railroad line to Boston was constructed.

The style first appeared in England, where new discoveries of ancient temples had spurred the interest of both architects and scholars in Greek civilization. In this country Green Revival achieved the status of a national architecture, becoming the predominant style for commercial, civic and religious buildings, residences, and even for utilitarian structures like carriage houses. Its widespread appeal undoubtedly lay in the often expressed sentiment that Americans were the spiritual successors of the democratic ideals of ancient Greece, a feeling evident not only in architecture but also borne out by the Greek names of many of America's newly-formed towns - Sparta, Ithaca, Attica and Athens.

The Greek temple (Fig. 35) provided the model for the Greek Revival style, the first in a series of 19th century styles based on historical precedents. Its triangular front pediment and columned portico were copied for residential designs. The temple form necessitated a rearrangement of the traditional orientation of the house, so that its narrow, gabled side faced the street. (See Fig. 20.) The main entrance was shifted to the edge of the facade and opened into a hall that ran along the side of the building. (See Fig. 12.) These two changes produced the front-gabled/side hall house type that remained in vogue for the rest of the century.

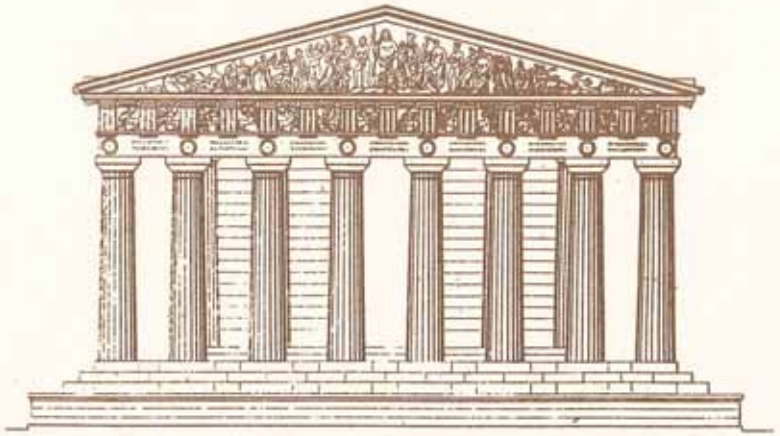


Fig. 35 The Parthenon (438 B.C.)

The column, with its three styles of capitals and surmounting entablature (Fig. 36), was a favored form of ornament in the Greek Revival period. Both column and capital were usually mass-produced by large lumber companies, rather than fashioned by the local carpenter. A less expensive version of the column, the pilaster, was easily constructed by nailing a wide vertical board to corners and door frames, tacking on a few moldings to suggest a capital. Similarly, a series of flat boards and molding strips could be used to reproduce the classical entablature.

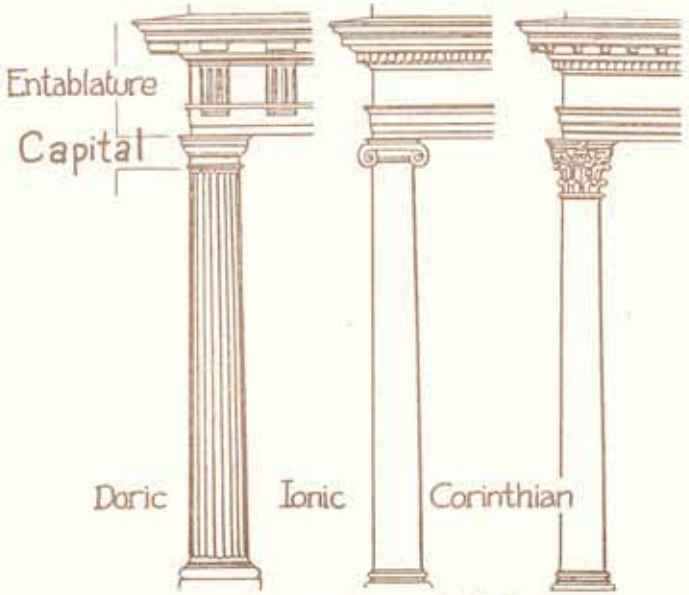


Fig. 36 THE CLASSICAL ORDERS

For elaborate Greek Revival style residences, the temple front was less popular in Newton Corner than a local variation of the style which places both pediment and entrance at the building's side and a row of four monumental columns across the front. The Bacon family owned several of these houses, one of which remains at 14-18 Bacon Street. A fine, well-preserved example with four Ionic columns is the former Salisbury residence (Fig. 37), erected at Walnut Park in the 1840's.

A more modest local interpretation of the style is typified by several front-gabled houses on Church Street. Here the pedimented form of the classical model appears in its customary front position (Fig. 38). In this house the monumental row of columns has been reduced in scale to a single-story porch, with wide pilasters used at the corners.

Fig. 37 62 Walnut Park

Fig. 38 234 Church Street

Gothic Revival 1840 - 1880

The Middle Ages provides another historical source for 19th century house styles. Small, vaguely Gothic garden structures began to appear on English country estates by the late 1700's, and in the early 19th century medieval designs were introduced for more elaborate residences. The pointed arches, stained glass and soaring towers of medieval cathedrals were suitable for churches, but in domestic architecture Gothic influence was more tenuous. Confined to a few specifically medieval details, Gothic Revival house design, especially in this country, was more closely connected with the ornamental garden cottages of the late 18th century than with the monuments of the Middle Ages.

The American public had acquired an interest in the Middle Ages through popular historical novels with medieval settings like Sir Walter Scott's Downing (1815-1852), a Hudson River Valley landscape architect, promoted the Gothic Revival style that this popular interest in the days of castles and knightly combat focused on medieval architecture. Downing became a leading interpreter of the new fashion for the picturesque, Gothic suburban cottages and country estates, accompanying his widely-read articles and books with sample house designs in scenic landscaped settings.

The Gothic Revival, one of several picturesque styles espoused by Downing and his contemporaries, marked a departure from the compact house forms, restrained decoration and rules of symmetry imposed in classical styles like the Federal and Greek Revival. It typified the new picturesque mode, with wings that projected in several directions, steep, complex roofs with several gables and dormers, and ornate wooden detail. Introduced at the beginning of the fashion for picturesque designs, the Gothic Revival was relatively restrained compared with later, more flamboyant styles.

Although it was essentially a suburban style, Gothic Revival houses were rare in Newton Corner. This cottage on Franklin Street (Fig. 39) is one of very few local examples. Sheathed with the typical board-and-batten siding of the wood-frame "Carpenter Gothic" versions of the style, the house displays a modest amount of the "inch-board finery" condemned by contemporary critics of picturesque architecture. The newly-invented scroll saw, a machine similar to the modern jigsaw, allowed local sawmills and carpentry shops to produce thousands of board feet of "gingerbread" trim. Much of the wooden detailing in this house is medieval in inspiration, including the vergeboards at the eaves and pointed arches of the porch supports. Both porch and vergeboards are decorated with three- and four-part keyhole-shaped designs based on medieval trefoils and quatrefoils.

Fig. 39 276 Franklin Street

Italianate 1840 - 1880

Unlike the Gothic Revival, the Italianate style enjoyed immense popularity in Newton Corner. Its historical origins can be traced to the rural architecture of northern Italy. The style was first introduced in England, again under the impetus for picturesque architectural design, and seems to have originated in a renewed interest in 17th century landscape paintings, many of which illustrated romantic Italian country villas.

The Italianate arrived in this country during the 1840's. Under various names, including the Tuscan, Lombard, Bracketed and Italian Villa styles, it was promoted widely in architectural publications by Andrew Jackson Downing and his contemporaries as an appropriate style for the scenic rural landscape.

A low, sometimes hipped, roof with extended eaves was an important component of Italianate design, but the rows of ornate scroll-sawn brackets at the eaves became the style's signature. Narrow round-arched windows were also a ubiquitous feature of the Italianate. Outlined by prominent moldings that trace the curving upper profile of the arch, these windows often appeared in pairs.

The front porch, which by the mid-1800's had become an indispensable part of Victorian life, was ornamented with elaborate brackets and wooden arches that spanned the distance between the porch supports. Fashioned into a square shape by nailing together several thin boards, porch posts were much plainer in the Italianate era than in later Victorian period styles.

Fig. 40 60 William Street

Fig. 41 41 Vernon Street

Newton Corner has many good examples of Italianate design. One of the most interesting is this house on William Street (Fig. 40), which in diminutive proportions imitates the grand silhouette of the rural Italian villa. Charmingly picturesque in effect, the house has two connecting wings punctuated by a central tower with round-arched windows.

The Italianate style was also favored for the ornate suburban residences that Boston merchants built in the 1840's and 1850's on Newton Corner's hillsides and at Waban Park. Virtually all of these early mansions have been remodeled. This example, which has lost its eaves bracketing, was long known as the Rawson estate (Fig. 41). A more conservative architectural statement than the small villa at William Street, the design for this residence uses the traditional end-gabled house form, broken at the center by a projecting pavilion. The round-arched windows are a characteristic Italianate feature.

The Italianate style spanned two periods of major growth in the areas adjoining Newton Corner's business district, the years between 1845 and 1860 and the post-Civil War era. Unlike the more comlex Gothic Revival, the style could be readily adapted by local builders, who added rows of ornate brackets to the already familiar front- and end-gabled house forms. Two distinctive local variations in the detailing of these houses are the use of tooth-like blocks, or dentils, at the eaves, and paired first-story bay windows at the side of the building.

Mansard 1855 - 1880

Regardless of the derivation of a building's decorative ornament, it may be termed Mansard style if it has a mansard roof. Essentially a hybrid form, in Newton Corner the style borrowed round-arched windows, bracketing, boxed porch posts and its interior floor plans from the Italianate. The mansard roof was appreciated by the Victorian public as a new, distinctive form, but its chief appeal lay in its practicality. The roof's height allowed for increased headroom in the attic, adding an extra usable floor to many buildings. In some instances a new mansard roof was added to an older houses for this specific purpose.

The roof area assumed special significance in the Mansard style and was decorated accordingly. The intersection of the mansard's two slopes was outlined with a series of prominent moldings, sometimes carried along the sides of the roof profile as well. Attic rooms were lit by shallow dormers that often took elaborate curved shapes, and ornamental slate, cut into geometric patterns and sometimes laid in several colors, decorated the roof surface.

The mansard roof was imported from France, where it had a major revival in the mid-19th century. Named for Francois Mansart, a 17th century architect, "la mansarde" derived from a provincial French roof form. The mansard reappeared during the Second Empire under the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870), where it was used in the enlargement of the Louvre palace during the 1850's. In this country the Mansard style was often referred to as "Second Empire," a designation that applied primarily to monumental structures of the 1860's and 1870's, such as Boston City Hall. Many mansard-roofed public buildings were erected during the post-Civil War administration of Ulysses S. Grant, giving rise to another name for the style, the "General Grant."

In residential architecture the Mansard style enjoyed wide popularity in new suburban areas like Newton Corner. Waverley Avenue, Park, Arlington and Church Street at Farlow Park, as well as Newtonville Avenue and Bennington Street on Mount Ida, were opened for development during the Mansard period and contain many fine examples of the style.

Fig. 42 78 Waverley Avenue

For elaborate Mansard residences (Fig. 42), the center pavilion of Newton Corner's Italianate estates was adopted, their traditional end-gabled form made more imposing by the prominent mansard roof. The scroll saw is much in evidence in this house, providing the ornate trim for its porch, window frames, dormers and eaves.

Fig. 43 1 Channing Street

A charming version of the style, the small Mansard cottage, is well represented in Newton Corner, particularly in the neighborhoods north of the Massachusetts Turnpike. Channing Street has several fine examples, among which is this small residence at the corner of Pearl Street (Fig. 43). Here the mansard roof has a steep, slanted profile rather than the more common, curving bellcast shape.

Stick Style 1865 - 1890

The Stick Style is a more picturesque contemporary of the Mansard and Italianate styles. In keeping with the conservative taste of Newton Corner's mid-19th century residents, it enjoyed less popularity here than the latter styles. The Stick Style's steep gable roofs, decorated wall surfaces, verge-boards and multi-wing plans were an extension of the Gothic Revival, another style that found little favor in Newton Corner.

The central feature of the Stick Style is a network of thin, flat boards applied over a clapboard wall surface, laid in a pattern of horizontals, diagonals and verticals that symbolized the building's interior framing. Stickwork, as this decorative system is called, covered the upper level and gables, although in many Newton Corner houses it was confined to simple horizontal boards that crossed at each floor level and at the tops and sills of the window frames.

Fig. 44 52 Eldredge Street

Newton Corner has several well-designed Stick Style residences, most of which were built between 1870 and the late 1880's. This house near Farlow Park (Fig. 44) has a distinctive front tower and features the modest system of stickwork, confined here to horizontal boarding between the floor levels and around the windows, that was favored locally. The curving profile of its lathe-turned porch posts became a popular decorative motif between 1880 and 1900.

Queen Anne 1875 - 1910

The energy and inventiveness of the Queen Anne style gave full expression to the theme of picturesque symmetry that had been an undercurrent in American architecture since the 1840's. The style is eclectic, meaning that it drew from many sources for inspiration, including contemporary British decorative arts, medieval cottages and, toward the end of its popularity, from American colonial architecture. Its name was coined in England to describe a series of quasi-medieval manor houses built in the mid-1800's and was taken, with no discernible logic, from the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714). The style received great publicity here through the popular British pavilions at the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia, whose Queen Anne design caught the imagination of the American public.

Queen Anne houses are not compact. Rooms spill outward from a central core in no set pattern, exterior walls project at several intervals, the roofline is correspondingly complex, and attached are all manner of porches, balconies and bay windows. Designers in this style played on the contrast of materials as well as forms. It is not unusual to find brick, stone, clapboards, wood shingles, stucco and elaborately molded plaster or clay panels in a single Queen Anne house.

The Queen Anne style is well represented in Newton Corner. Examples of the style range from several ornate, architect-designed residences, to large, comfortable builders' housing and the less elaborate multi-family dwellings. The best remaining examples can be found on Hunnewell Hill, Mount Ida and Franklin Street.

Built in 1887 for Levi B. Gay according to plans by George Meacham, a local architect, this house summarizes the freeform approach of Queen Anne design (Fig. 45). In addition to the use of several materials and numerous projecting windows, balconies and porches, the building's woodwork is also testimony to the inventiveness of the Queen Anne period. Going far beyond the flat, relatively simple shapes of the scroll saw, the wood trim here is gouged, chiseled, carved and lathe-turned in a remarkable variety of designs.

Fig. 45 303 Franklin Street

Fig. 46 130 Washington Street
King's Handbook of Newton (1889)

The Gay residence conveys Queen Anne informality in a rather formal material, brick and stone masonry. The more popular expression of the style, however, was in wood frame construction. Large, comfortable homes with long front porches, several bay windows, and often a corner tower, were built in Newton Corner through the early 1900's (Fig. 46). The Queen Anne's preference for textured walls was expressed in wooden houses by the use of clapboards for the first story, with wood shingles, often shaped in decorative patterns, at the upper levels.

Late in the 19th century the style took a less fanciful turn, hardening into a more historical, medieval version that is illustrated by a few large Newton Corner mansions on Hunnewell Hill and Franklin Street. The pulled-in, rectangular form of this house (Fig. 47), its symmetrically balanced gables and carved vergeboard ornament are characteristic. The building's overall appearance recalls the Gothic Revival, but its shingled walls and sober ornament place the design at the turn of the century.

Fig. 47 295 Franklin Street

Shingle Style 1885 - 1910

The Shingle Style evolved from the Queen Anne and shares with it an informal appearance and freedom in the arrangement of its interior spaces. The first truly American style, it developed from a new interest in American colonial architecture, particularly the early, rambling farmhouses of the New England region (Fig. 48). The gambrel roof that characterized many of these buildings became a favorite feature of the Shingle Style, which also adopted more formal aspects of later colonial architecture, such as the columned porch.

The style was popular in New England seacoast resorts like Newport and Bar Harbor, Maine, where its hallmark, the use of natural or brown-stained wood shingles, was particularly suited to the seaside air and rocky maritime scenery. Although the Shingle Style also appeared in suburban settings, it never took hold in Newton Corner, at least for large, elaborate residences.

Shingling covered not only the walls of these houses, but often the roof, corners, porch posts, bracketing and curving sides of the window openings as well. Although the style incorporated the circular towers and long front porches of the Queen Anne period, its uniform shingled wall texture gave these houses a quieter, less frenetic appearance. Decorative detail was similarly sedate, and generally confined to porch columns, bay windows, large dormers and rows of recessed windows. In the most progressive examples of the style ornamental trim was purged of all historical references and the busy wood detail of previous eras entirely eliminated.

Fig. 48 Fairbanks House (1636)
Dedham Massachusetts
(American Architect, 1881)

Fig. 49 41 Washington Street

Rough-surfaced stone, a material that complemented the natural texture of wood shingles, was sometimes used in the first story of Shingle Style buildings, as in this example on Washington Street (Fig. 49). This house displays the broad gables, curved window frames and rustic effect that were part of good Shingle Style design.

Local builders liked the style and reproduced two key elements - the shingled walls and prominent, broad roofs - in several large, rambling middle class houses erected between 1890 and 1910. The best of these builder-designed residences are clustered in the Hunnewell Hill neighborhood.

Colonial Revival 1890 - 1910

After the Centennial year American architects began to examine their own heritage for inspiration. The first result of this new interest became apparent with the Shingle Style. As the decade of the eighties drew to a close, a new set of references to early American architecture coalesced into a full-fledged style, the Colonial Revival. The style represented a return to historical sources for architectural design, with the important difference that the original models were copied more faithfully than had been the case with the evocative picturesque styles of the mid-19th century.

The Colonial Revival, however, borrowed freely from several phases of 18th century architecture and from the post-colonial Federal style as well. Long schooled to admire the picturesque, American homeowners were unwilling to accept a copy of the more pristine, austere houses of the early 1700's and demanded versions of the most elaborate originals (Fig. 50). With millwork machines close at hand, Colonial Revival builders could trim the new style with the same profusion of detail that had characterized earlier periods. The scale of these buildings was altered to reflect the accepted notion of the appropriate size for a comfortable house, which by modern standards was unusually large. Thus the narrow fanlit doorway of the Federal period was greatly expanded to accommodate the grand entrance of the Colonial Revival house.

Colonial Revival ornament began appearing in Queen Anne designs of the 1880's and was also used for the porch and window areas of Shingle Style residences. Basically classical in derivation, it included large pilasters, columns, oval windows

Fig. 50 Longfellow House (1750)
Cambridge, Massachusetts

from the Federal period, elaborate cornices, balustrades, urns and Palladian windows, an 18th century motif with an arched center window flanked by two narrower openings.

The Colonial Revival style rejected the lack of discipline in architectural form that reached its apex with the Queen Anne period. Although many examples of the Queen Anne were excessive in detail and often unsatisfactory in design, this reaction brought an end to the freedom and creativity that had characterized American architecture in the decades following the Civil War.

Fig. 51 63 Elmhurst Road

The typical Colonial Revival house was confined to a rectilinear shape (Fig. 51). Although projections appear in the form of shallow, rounded bay windows, they are subordinated to the boxy overall form of the design. The house was usually capped by a broad hip roof, although both the gable and gambrel forms were used as well. The precepts of strict symmetry were observed for the front of the Colonial Revival style residence. The entrance occupied a center position, often emphasized by a columned porch. The central part of the facade, further delineated by large second-level windows, in many designs projects forward in a pavilion outlined by two-story pilasters. This classic house form was duplicated with many variations here, with many fine examples in the Hunnewell Avenue area.

Worker's Housing

Nineteenth century architectural styles found expression primarily in housing for the upper and middle classes, although an occasional reference to the currently fashionable style appears in the modest workers' homes of Nonantum and Newton Corner. In the Greek Revival period this stylistic trim took the form of a heavy cornice at the roof eaves and entrance, and in the Italianate era as bracketing. Lathe-turned porch posts with bulbous profiles, walls covered with both clapboards and wood shingles and simple vergeboards suggested the Queen Anne style. And finally, at the close of the 19th century, the Colonial Revival was represented by the use of columns in the front porch.

Stylistic detail in workers' housing often appeared several years after it had been fashionable with the middle class. In most cases, especially in the mid-19th century, it was omitted entirely. The worker's house evolved instead outside the mainstream of architectural design, deriving from a practical, conservative tradition of building that suited the needs and pocketbook of the workingman. Narrow, inexpensive lots, as well as small dwellings compactly arranged to hold a good-sized family, were the rule in the workers' districts of Nonantum and Newton Corner. House design was of necessity standardized, with little variation in form, room arrangement or decorative features.

The exterior of a simple, rectangular, gable-roofed building could take two forms, end-gabled or front-gabled (Figs. 19,20) and had two standard alternatives for floor plans (Figs. 11,12). The typical workers' cottage had two side-by-side first-floor rooms and a small, centered entry area, or back-to-back rooms with an offset front entry. These basic floor plans were multiplied for double houses later in the 19th century.

The local carpenter played a key role in the development of workers' housing. A large proportion of the workingmen of both Nonantum and New-Corner carried out this trade. In the housing they built for the area's wealthier residents, these carpenters found several features that could be adapted for their own dwellings and those of their neighbors. It is this ingenious system of borrowing what was suitable, discarding what was too elaborate or expensive, and inventing new forms as the need arose that makes the development of the worker's house an important factor in Nonantum and Newton Corner architecture, and in the study of architectural history as a whole.

CENTER-ENTRY PLAN TYPES

The small, end-gabled cottages that were to remain popular for workers' housing until several decades after the Civil War had been introduced in Newton by the 1830's. This house type (Fig. 52) is found in other Boston area communities, such as Cambridge, and in early industrial villages scattered throughout southern New England, but Newton Corner and Nonantum have together a relatively large number of good examples.

Though probably first developed by Yankee carpenters, these modest, 1½ story cottages were associated for the most part with the Irish workmen who moved to Newton Corner and Nonantum just prior to the Civil War. Concentrations of early workers' houses are found in the Gardner-School Street area

Fig. 52 326 California Street

of Newton Corner and on Watertown, Green, Adams, Chandler, Cook and Chapel Streets in Nonantum.

The prototypical building of this period was small, inexpensive to build, plain and soundly constructed. In dimensions the main body of the house measured an average of 25 feet by 15 feet, customarily expanded with a short rear wing that contained a small kitchen. The inside was arranged with a center-entry floor plan (Fig. 53). There were two small rooms on the first floor, positioned at either side of the front door. The entrance opened into a small stair area leading directly up to the attic sleeping quarters. Window glass was expensive, so both the size and number of openings were kept to a minimum. Typically each ground floor room had a front and side window and single gable windows lit the upper bedroom level of the house.

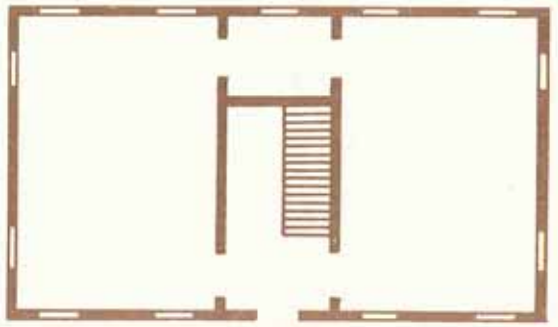


Fig. 53

The cramped, poorly lit condition of the sleeping rooms was alleviated somewhat by a construction technique known as kneewall framing. In traditional house construction the slope of the roof began just above the ceiling level of the uppermost rooms, a situation that produced very little headroom in the attic. In kneewall buildings the framing was carried several feet above to allow a short vertical wall area in the attic rooms before the roof began its inward path (Fig. 54). Most workers' housing built after the Civil War had a full two stories.

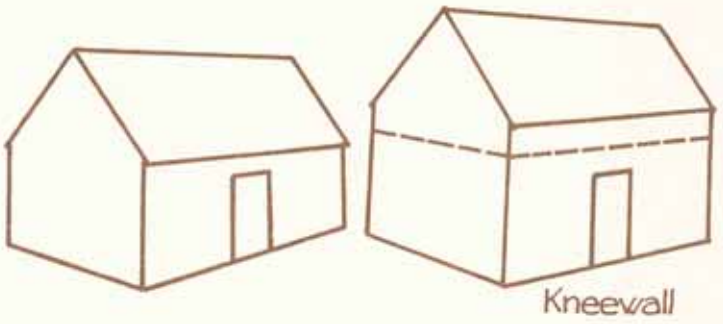
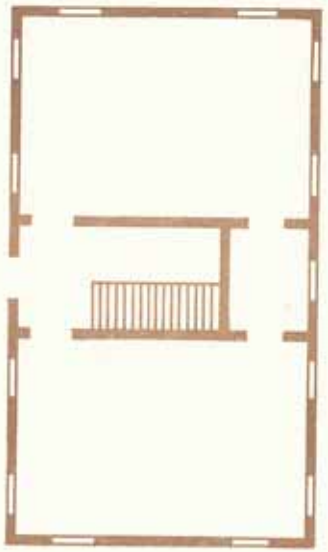


Fig. 54

The basic, narrow two-room plan for a typical worker's cottage was usually encased in an end-gabled house. This form, however, was too wide to fit on 20 to 30 foot lots. The same floor plan could be retained by converting to the front-gabled house type, with the entrance appearing at the side of the lot (Figs. 55, 56). In the Gardner-School Street neighborhood of Newton Corner this variation was often built two deep on a single, narrow strip of property.

The 1½ story, kneewall-framed cottage proved a popular, durable house form. It was the standard worker's dwelling of the 1860's and continued in use for several decades, its last appearance occurring in the speculative court developments along Adams Street in Nonantum during the early 1890's.



Center - entry plan,
Front - gabled cottage

Fig. 55

Fig. 56 22 School Street

SIDE-ENTRY PLAN TYPE

The Greek Revival phase of stylistic architecture introduced a new house form, the front-gabled/side hall plan house (Figs. 12,20,38). In this building type both the narrow gable wall and main entrance were located at the front of the building.

Reduced to a story and a half, the new form was quickly adapted by local carpenters for workers' dwellings (Fig. 57). Because of the need for maximum interior space, the side hallway was converted to a shallow entry area that occupied the same offset, or side, position as the long hall of Greek Revival style buildings. Although the side-entry plan predominated in most early industrial communities, the workingmen of Nonantum and Newton Corner preferred the center entrance form. Early side-entry cottages were usually built with the popular kneewall method of interior framing.

Fig. 57 9 Gardner Street

Many 2½ story side hall plan houses were erected in Nonantum after the Civil War, and were especially popular in the 1880's and 1890's. Except for their lack of ornamental trim, these single-family houses differed very little from the front-gabled/side hall designs of the Greek Revival and Italianate periods. Their comparatively large size brought the boarder, a 19th century institution that provided a source of extra income for the local homeowner and a temporary residence for the newly-arrived immigrant and mill worker.

MULTI-FAMILY HOUSES

Before 1880, most workers' housing in this section of Newton was owned and occupied by a single family. As the population increased and lots became more expensive, this type of residence was replaced, particularly in Nonantum, by the double house.

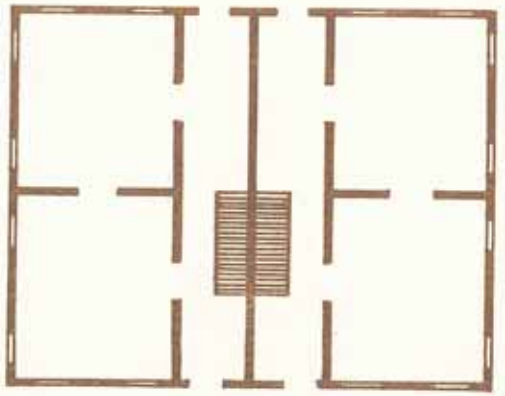
The prevalence of housing designed for two families in the late 19th century did not necessarily introduce a corresponding decline in the number of homeonwers, although there were many absentee landlords in this period. A typical pattern involved the purchase of a newly-built double house by a worker's family for their own living quarters, with the extra rental unit providing an additional source of family income.

Double houses were arranged symmetrically and designed to appear as a large version of the free-standing, single-family dwelling. There were two basic types in Nonantum and Newton Corner, both adapted from plan configurations that had been in use for single-family houses.

The standard double house of the 1880's consists in plan of two adjacent side hall houses and in form resembles the end-gabled workers' cottage (Figs. 58, 59). This house type, with its paired entrances, existed in Newton Corner before the 1860's and elsewhere had been built much earlier. Later examples, such as the house on Los Angeles Street, were 2½ stories high, with the narrow side walls expanded to incorporate two rooms.

The rowhouse can be seen as a multiplication of this format, duplicating the side hall plan in

Fig. 58 81-83 Los Angeles Street



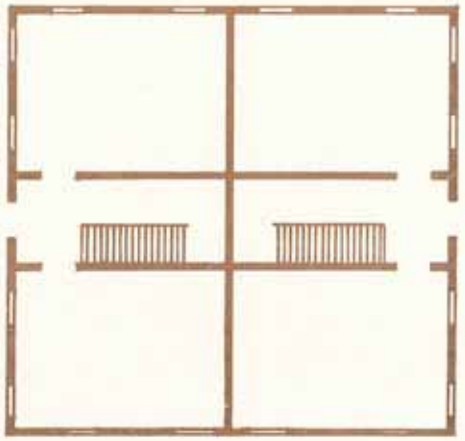
Side-entry plan,
End-gabled double house

Fig. 59

three or more units. This basically urban form was rarely built in Newton, although examples remain at Avon Place, 55-56 Cook Street and 111-117 West Street.

A second type of double house, based on the front-gabled/center entry worker's cottage, existed in Newton Corner as early as 1840. It consisted of two of these houses placed back-to-back, with individual side entrances (Figs. 60, 61).

Although relatively rare in other areas of metropolitan Boston, the side-entry double house was extremely popular in Nonantum, especially during the 1890's. Variety occurs in the treatment of the entrances of these houses, which are fronted by small enclosed vestibules, an open porch or two-story projecting stairhall.



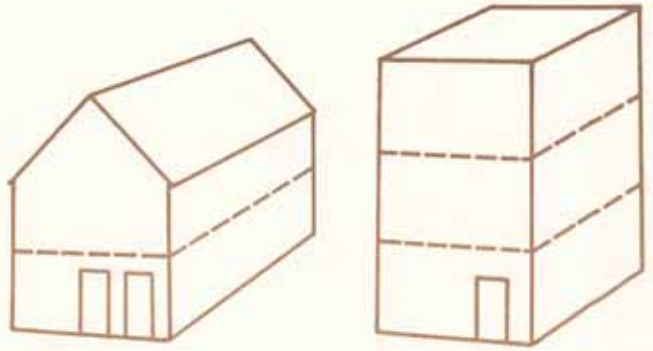
Center-entry plan,
Front-gabled double house

Fig. 60

Fig. 61 22-24 Middle Street

Late in the 19th century a new, very different form of double-occupancy housing appeared. Known as the "two-family house," several early examples of this building type, dating from the 1890's, were built on Beech Street in Nonantum.

On the exterior are paired, offset entrances in the front gable wall. The interior arrangement, however, is radically different from the double house form. Instead of adjacent units, the apartments are stacked above one another (Fig. 62). One entrance opens to a ground-floor apartment, with the adjacent door providing access to a second apartment on the upper floor. Triple deckers follow the same horizontal divisions, only with three rather than two apartment and usually with a single entrance door. The common flat-roofed, Boston style three decker did appear in both Newton Corner and Nonantum after the turn of the century, although there are very few examples.



Two-family Triple Decker

Fig. 62

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