Newton's 19th Century Architecture: West Newton

Department of Planning and Development
Newton Historical Commission

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Introduction

Throughout most of America's past, 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 last 50 to 100 years. Designed to please a consumer whose tastes were quite different from our own, much of this environment, particularly from the 19th century, has been unappreciated, ignored, or simply misunderstood.

This guide has been prepared as an introduction to the architecture of West Newton, a community whose housing is primarily the product of the Victorian era. Included in the booklet are a survey of West Newton's 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 the villages of Newton Corner and Nonantum was completed in 1977, with 800 structures recorded the following year in a study area that includes most of West Newton. Based in part on information from the Jackson Homestead's Newton's Older Houses series, which covers the City's pre-1855 residences, this inventory records the architectural style, date, significance and historical background of each structure built prior to 1907.

A guide to 19th century architecture in Newton Corner and Nonantum has been published as part of the Historical Properties Survey, along with walking tours for each of these villages. A similar tour of West Newton's village center is available in conjunction with the West Newton phase of the survey.

Several people have provided 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, Helen Levy of the Allen School and House Preservation Corporation, Lillie Jefferson of the Myrtle Baptist Church, and Helen Evans. Wayne Altree of Newton South High School, along with several of his students, Robert Walker, and Patricia Cotton have also contributed to various phases of the West Newton 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.

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Newton Historical Properties Survey,
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I. The Growth and Development of West Newton

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 next to Brookline, Brighton and West Roxbury.

Route 128, the metropolitan area's suburban beltway, crosses the western perimeter of Newton and intersects with the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension, which extends through the City's northern neighborhoods. 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. West Newton, located at the City's northern edge, is one of Newton's largest villages.

West Newton, which has a current population of approximately 14,600, was settled in the mid-1600's. It remained a tiny hamlet until the Boston & Wor-

Fig. 1 Plan of West Newton, showing boundaries of the study area for the Newton Historical Properties Survey.

KEY
☐ WITHIN TARGET AREA
☐ OUTSIDE TARGET AREA

cester Railroad, which later became the Boston & Albany line, was built as far as West Newton in 1834. By mid-century the village enjoyed a national reputation for its experimental private schools and had attracted several members of Boston's intellectual community. The fine, Victorian architecture that characterizes much of West Newton is a legacy of the community's major period of growth between the Civil War and the first decade of the 20th century.

One of a series of villages that lie along Newton's northern perimeter, West Newton is located near the Charles River and shares its northern border with the City of Waltham (Fig. 1). The village of Auburndale lies to the west, and Newtonville to the east with Albemarle Road serving as its boundary with West Newton.

Most of West Newton encompasses a broad expanse of flat lands that stretch from the Waltham border near the Charles River to Washington Street. West Newton Hill, a rocky eminence that rises just to the south of Washington Street, forms the community's southern edge, beyond which lies the village of Waban.

Cheesecake Brook flows through the village from Waban, paralleling Washington and Watertown Streets until it turns northward near Albemarle Road toward the Charles River. According to tradition, the brook's whimsical name derives from a picnic of cheese and cake enjoyed by several of Newton's early settlers along its picturesque banks. The stream was channeled and partly placed underground in a late 19th century sewage and flood control project. Cheesecake Boulevard, now called Albemarle Road, was laid out as a parkway along its lower course at this time.

THE FARMING COMMUNITY

Newton's first white settler was Deacon John Jackson, who arrived at Newton Corner in 1639 and laid claim to land that was then part of the Town of Cambridge. The settlement, first known as Cambridge Village, became the separate Town of Newtowne in 1688. During the 1660's, a meeting house had been established at Newton Centre, which became Newtowne's new focus of settlement.

In the 17th century West Newton was a sparsely settled outpost comprised largely of forests, meadows and swamps. Its land included part of three large grants in the northwestern section of Newtowne that belonged to Richard Park, Isaac Williams and John Fuller, who settled near Cheesecake Brook.

During the mid-1700's descendants of these families were among those who sought to break from the congregation at Newton Centre and form a new church at West Newton. The West Parish, as it was called, drew its members from families in West Newton, Nonantum, Auburndale, Newtonville and Lower Falls. The meeting house at West Newton was built in 1764 near the present park at the corner of Washington and Cherry Streets.

At this time religion still played a predominant role in community life, and the organization of a separate meeting house often marked the first step toward establishing a new town. Because Newton

had split from the Town of Cambridge by forming a church at Newton Centre, the new meeting house at West Newton may have contributed to the suspicion with which it was apparently viewed. In any event, Newton Centre obviously perceived the establishment of another congregation as a threat to its central position within the community.

Despite the fact that its meeting house had been standing for almost 15 years, West Parish had difficulty in achieving formal recognition. Boundary disputes delayed official approval until 1778, when the Massachusetts General Court granted West Parish the right to incorporate, but the congregation was not formally recognized as an independent church by the Town of Newton until three years later.

Arguments over the parish boundaries became acrimonious at times. The story is handed down that at one point during the dispute, a line was drawn through a large squash field and crossed a large squash. The better part of this vegetable lay on the West Newton side, giving rise to Newton Centre's derisive nickname for the upstart community, "Squash End." Rivalry between the two villages extended well into the 19th century over the location of Newton's town hall.

The early history of West Newton is dominated by strong personalities. The first of many men and women to play an important role in village life was William Greenough, first minister of West Parish. A fiery preacher and a conservative in all respects, Greenough became pastor in 1781, remaining at this influential post until his death a half century later. Arriving at a time when the strict tenets of the puritan faith were losing sway, Greenough held his flock firmly within the ranks of orthodoxy and, as pastor of West Parish, became a well known voice for the most conservative wing of the Congregational Church.

A stern and religious man, Reverend Greenough is remembered for his strong personal reprimands of wayward parishioners, particularly those who failed to keep the Sabbath. It is said that in his later years hordes of small boys followed him on his visits to Boston, gazing in wonder at the Reverend's quaint, pre-Revolutionary War knee breeches and buckled shoes. Greenough Street, where the parsonage stood, survives as the only reminder of this fearsome, colorful resident of West Newton.

The West Newton of William Greenough's first day at West Parish was quite different from the village that existed at the time of his death in 1831. Before 1800, West Newton consisted of a few outlying farms, the burial ground at River Street, and the church, a small grocery store and a tavern at the village center. The community was located along the old Natick Road—now Washington Street—which served horse and wagon traffic into Boston. Phineas Bond's tavern, which refreshed the thirsty travelers, and the town pump in front, which took care of their horses, were without doubt West Newton's best known landmarks of this era. The tavern stood at Washington Street by the great old elm tree that probably gave nearby Elm Street its name.

The "mansion house," West Newton's largest and most elaborate residence, also became one of the

Fig. 2 Mansion House
428-432 Cherry Street

most important buildings in this period. Owned during the late 1700's by John Pigeon, one of Newton's prominent Revolutionary War patriots, the oldest section of the house was built about 1716 by William Williams. It stood on Washington Street until the mid-19th century, when it was moved to 428-432 Cherry Street (Fig. 2).

By 1831, the community had become less isolated. Washington Street, now a major route into Boston from the west, brought over 20 stagecoaches a day to West Newton. The village had grown to include about 30 houses, mostly farmsteads, along Washington, Watertown, Waltham and Auburn Streets. The population was too small, however, to sustain a self-supporting business district and the few commercial ventures in the village were related primarily to the through-traffic to Boston. Chief among these was the Davis Hotel, a large brick building that still stands at the intersection of Washington and Watertown Streets.

Newly built in 1831, the hotel represented a major capital investment and an optimistic statement about the town's future. Its owner, Seth Davis, was the second of West Newton's important personalities. His lifetime spanned the village's early years as a farming community through its heyday as a prosperous post-Civil War suburb. Davis was remembered in the late 19th century as "a lovely clear minded old man, with scarce-wrinkled and smooth-shaven face, and a smile full of vivacity." His 100th birthday in 1887 was celebrated at the Davis homestead at 32 Eden Avenue by City officials and a crowd of thousands of well-wishers.

A schoolmaster, politician, lecturer and naturalist who planted almost a thousand trees in Newton, Seth Davis exerted a major influence on community life through most of the 19th century. He was also a shrewd investor in real estate at the village center, quickly realizing the potential impact of the railroad that was rumored for West Newton in 1831.

THE EARLY RAILROAD SUBURB

In April 1834 the Boston & Worcester Railroad made its first official run to Newton. The company's tracks had been laid as far as West Newton, which served for a brief period as the line's terminal station. The trains stopped near the Davis Hotel,

where passengers changed to stagecoaches to continue their journey.

The English-built "Meteor" and its sister locomotive, the "Rocket," were the first regularly scheduled passenger trains in the Northeast. In daily trips to Boston, they carried only two to eight passengers in each half-hour run. The train, in its early days, no doubt had many detractors in the crowds that gathered to watch at trackside, but it was to have a major impact on the village.

The railroad allowed easy access to and from the city, a fact that was quickly recognized by West Newton's first real estate developers. Land near the tracks was bought up and divided into house lots, although it wasn't until the next decade that people began to move to this small country village in significant numbers. Many members of this frist wave of new residents relied on the train in order to conduct business in Boston, but only in the Civil War era did the daily commuter apparently become a regular feature of West Newton life.

The community's population more than doubled between 1831 and 1848. By this time over 70 houses had been built. Cherry, Webster and Elm Streets extended from the village center, and West Newton Hill had been laid out with Chestnut, Otis and Highland Streets.

Webster Park, designed by Alexander Wadsworth in 1844, is a notable speculative development from this period. Located a few blocks north of the village center, the oval park and nearby Webster Street were built up with a series of nearly identical cottages. Wadsworth, a noted landscape architect, was also responsible for similar planned developments at Kenrick, Waban and Walnut Parks in Newton Corner.

The climate of money making and spending that accompanies a land boom was apparently present in West Newton during the 1840's and 1850's. In planning a move to the village in 1845, Horace Mann found that a choice 2½ acre lot on West Newton Hill would cost the outrageous sum of $950. Enamoured of the location, a site near the intersection of Chestnut and Highland Streets, he rationalized its purchase price by convincing himself that the land could be subdivided and the additional house lot

Fig. 3 West Newton (*ca.* 1860), artist unknown

sold for a profit. Commenting on her husband's investment in the West Newton property, Mary Peabody Mann wrote to a friend, "The locality is rising so much in value there is no doubt (the land) will sell for more."

Although he was a state legislator, member of Congress and a nationally prominent educator, Horace Mann was in many ways typical of West Newton's suburban residents. The nearby train station allowed him to travel to Boston conveniently whenever his work required it, yet his family could live in a peaceful rural village. The household overflowed with guests, for Mann frequently invited friends and relatives to take the train out for a weekend visit "in the country."

In the decades before the Civil War, West Newton was a transitional community, where the new, gleaming white houses and fenced estates of its suburban population coexisted with the older country village and its outlying farms (Fig. 3). The rise in population, however, brought a corresponding growth in services and institutions in the village. By 1855, West Newton had a new fire station, and the tiny village center contained a train station opposite Davis Street, a market, a post office, and a row of stores and artisan shops.

The village became the center of local government during this period, a factor that greatly enhanced its prestige within the Town of Newton. After a long dispute with Newton Centre over the relocation of the town hall, the old wood-frame West Parish meetinghouse at Cherry and Washington Streets was purchased and remodeled in 1848 for town offices (Fig. 4). A splendid Victorian

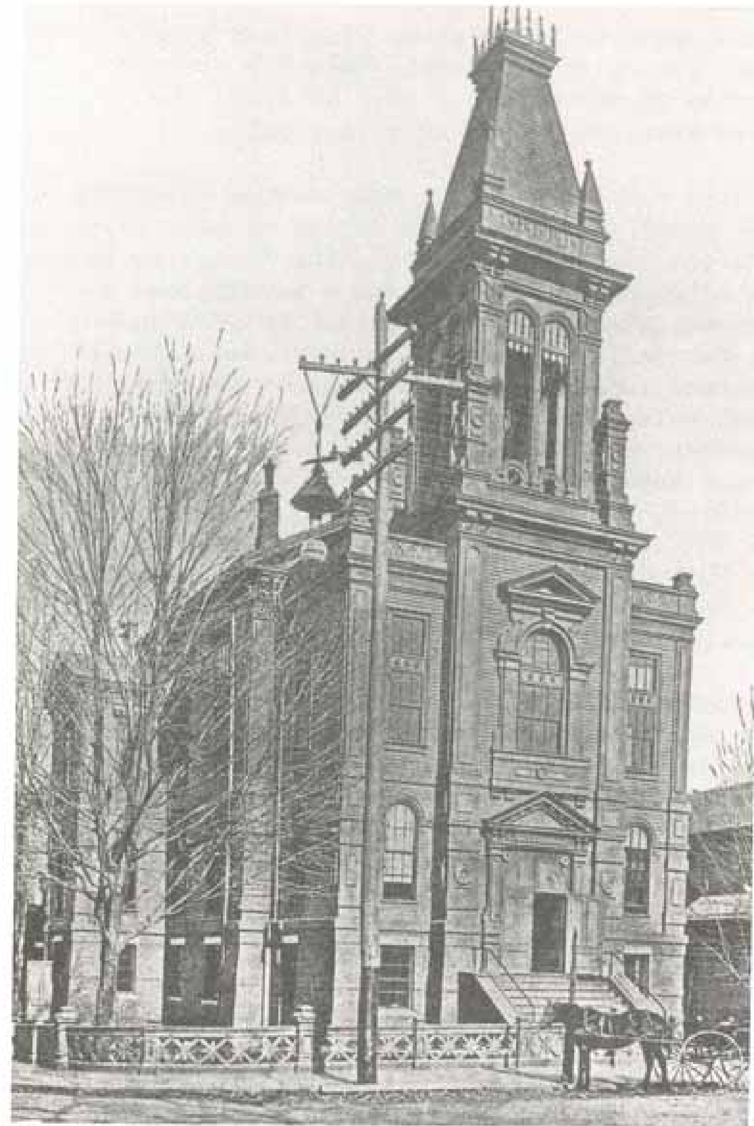


Fig. 4 Old City Hall (1848)

tower was added to this rather plain and simple building, giving it a suitably imposing appearance. When Newton became a city in 1873, the structure remained in use as a city hall.

The insular character of the West Newton community began to break apart with the influx of new residents in the 1840's and 1850's. The formation in 1848 of a Unitarian congregation — a religious society whose tolerance for different beliefs and concern for social issues would have been rejected as dangerous radicalism in the days of Reverend Greenough — is typical of this process. Among its founders were men representative of the village's new suburban population: Horace Mann, Cyrus Peirce, a noted educator, William Parker, an official of the Boston & Worcester Railroad, William Whitwell, an engineer in charge of building the Boston water works, and Galen Merrian, a coal merchant.

The village at this time also began to enjoy a growing reputation as a center for experimental programs in education, a factor that drew not only a host of guest-observers from other states and foreign countries, but also attracted families who enrolled their children in its renowned schools.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN WEST NEWTON

Although West Newton's interest in education can be traced to the 18th century, its fame as an educational center was tied to a single building, a small temple-like structure (Fig. 5) erected in 1830, at the corner of Washington and Highland Streets, on the site of the present Unitarian

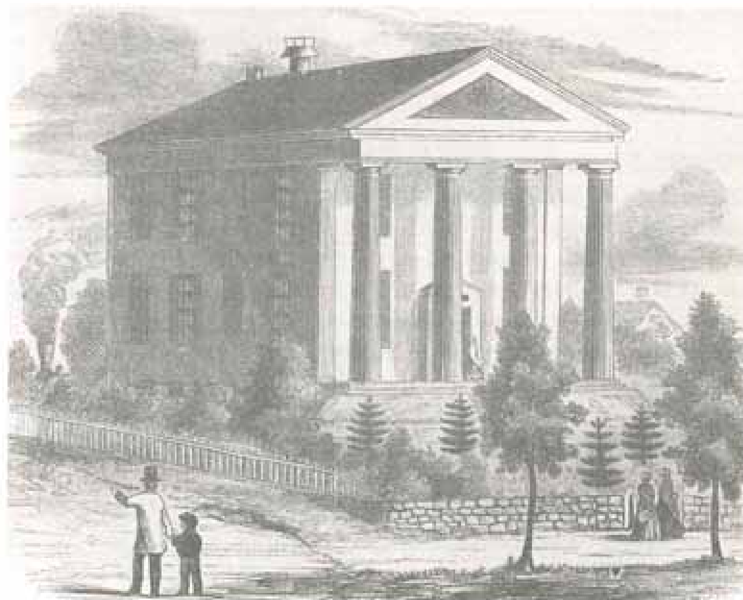


Fig. 5 Fuller Academy, about 1845

Church. Erected with funds from a bequest by Judge Abraham Fuller, for two years the building housed the Fuller Academy.

The Academy's schoolhouse became, successively, the home of a private academy sponsored by Seth Davis, the site of Horace Mann's experimental teacher training school, and, after 1854, the renowned West Newton English and Classical School, also called the Allen School. The building was demolished in 1905.

The first of West Newton's well-known educators, Seth Davis (1787-1888), came to the village in 1802.

Despite the fact that he had had little formal schooling, Davis was hired as a village schoolmaster by the Town. There were protests against his inclusion of geography and public speaking in the curriculum, and in 1812 Davis resigned to form the Davis Academy, where he could carry out his own methods of instruction without interference.

A gifted teacher, Seth Davis was able to attract the sons of Newton's prominent families to his academy, as well as pupils from nearby Boston and as far away as New York. Among its graduates were many of the Town's most illustrious citizens. Davis was recalled by Governor A.H. Rice, a former pupil, as a stern disciplinarian, watching over his students from the center of a classroom ringed with mirrors, and quick to sense any potential disruption to its strict decorum.

The Davis Academy's curriculum was traditional, although broader in scope than that of many similar schools. Davis was particularly interested in the sciences and built the first planetarium in the state on the school grounds for his students' instruction.

The original schoolhouse stood on Waltham Street. In the 1830's the school moved to the old Fuller Academy and then back to a new building on Waltham Street near the site of the present Davis School. Although the Academy closed its doors in the 1850's, Davis remained in West Newton, becoming one of the village's best known residents. Davis Avenue, Davis Court and Davis Street, as well as the Davis School, are named for him.

Horace Mann (1796-1859) has properly been called the father of American public school education (Fig. 6). As the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, Mann's writings and reforms sparked a revolution in school systems throughout the northern states. Among his many innovations that have had a lasting effect on the public schools are compulsory attendance, taxation in support of education, teacher training, public high schools and school libraries.

Fig. 6 Horace Mann (1796-1859)

It was the teacher training program, or Normal School, that brought Horace Mann to West Newton. The first state teachers school opened in Lexington in 1839. With the town's financial support waning and the schoolhouse overcrowded, the project was moved to the vacant Fuller Academy building in 1844.

The Normal School, named for the Ecole Normale Superiore of French educational reforms that took place under Napoleon, was an attempt to combat the poor quality that characterized most public school instruction in the first half of the 19th century. Its course was guided by the first principal, Cyrus Peirce (1790-1859), who pioneered a new curriculum that included not only basic academic subjects but also one of the country's first programs in professional teaching methodology. "Father" Peirce, a former minister, lived at 400 Cherry Street in West Newton until his death in 1859. The Peirce School at 88 Chestnut Street was named for him.

Cyrus Peirce is credited with having turned what many educators considered a dubious effort into a successful demonstration that attracted observers from many states and foreign countries to the West Newton school. A feature of the Normal School that attracted widespread attention was the model school, used to improve teaching methods by demonstrations within an actual classroom. Nathaniel T. Allen (1823-1903) was hired as principal of the model school in 1848, and it was here that he developed many of the techniques that would later make the Allen School famous.

The West Newton Normal School moved to Framingham and in 1852 Horace Mann's family reluctantly left for Ohio, where he became president of Antioch College. Mann's legacy to the village was the talented assistant he had brought to the Normal School, Nathaniel Allen, who remained in West Newton to found a new private school in 1854, at the again vacant Fuller Academy building.

The West Newton English and Classical School, commonly known as the Allen School, flourished under Nathaniel Allen's guidance, its experimental curriculum gaining a national reputation. Although many of its pupils were from Newton, some from families who had moved here specifically to enroll their children at the school, the student body was also drawn from throughout the United States and abroad.

The Allen School was responsible for many innovations in American education and its curriculum, teaching methodology and administration remain surprisingly timely. The school was coeducational, at a time when the sexes were taught separately, and racially integrated when segregation was the universal rule. One of the first kindergartens in the United States was established at the Allen School in the early 1860's.

The course of study at the West Newton English and Classical School can be characterized as progressive. Nathaniel Allen preferred to emphasize academic discipline, logical thought processes, enthusiasm and inquiry skills over rote learning, and, in fact, banned the study of rules for English grammar from the curriculum, replacing this with writing exercises in his pupils' daily journals. Instead of the foundation in ancient history and languages that formed the core of the traditional classical curriculum at the academies, Allen com-

bined his program with the "English" system. A forerunner of the modern high school curriculum, this course of study included modern history, languages, science, literature and social studies.

The Allen School also placed strong emphasis on learning outside the classroom. Botany was taught in the spring, when specimens could be gathered, and field trips were coordinated with discussions of current events as well as academic subjects. Guest lecturers became a regular part of the curriculum, exposing the students to political, social and intellectual issues of the day.

In one of this country's first physical education programs, the Allen School offered instruction in swimming and dance, in addition to a regular program of team sports. Its agricultural department organized trips to nearby farms to encourage physical training and a practical knowledge of farm life.

The school's organization was also unusual. It became largely a family enterprise, conducted by the brothers, wives, nephews, nieces and cousins of a family that had long been involved in education (Fig. 7). Students boarded with their teachers in a system of small, decentralized annexes located in the various homes of members of the Allen family throughout West Newton. The teachers met regularly to discuss their pupils' progress, and in an innovative plan, substituted written evaluations for letter grades.

After Nathaniel Allen's death in 1903, his daughters opened a private school for girls at the Allen house, which still stands at the corner of Webster and Cherry Streets near the village center. The house, which had been an integral part of the Allen School and a significant landmark in the history of the village, is currently being maintained and restored by the Allen School and House Preservation Corporation.

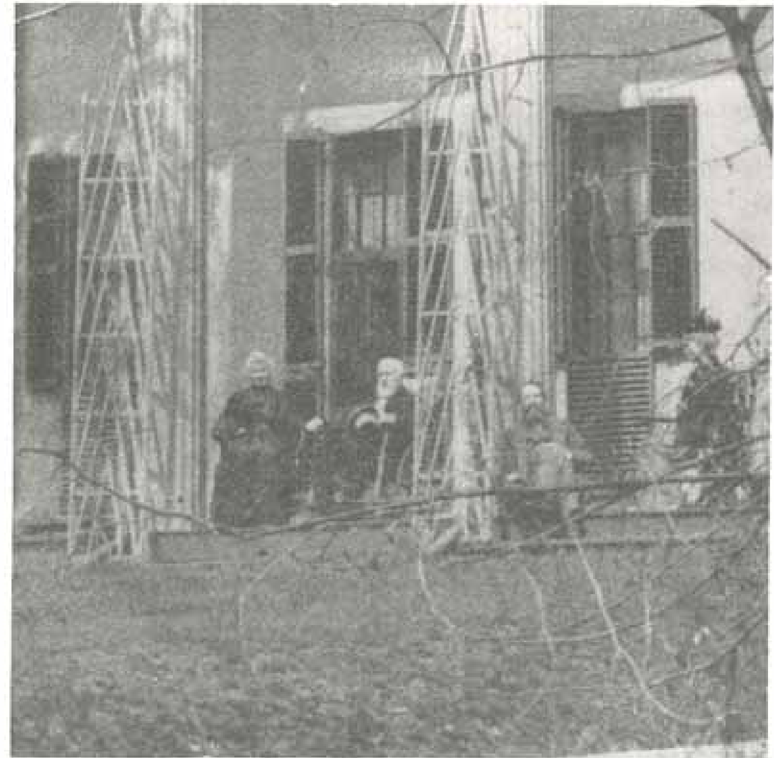


Fig. 7 Caroline B. Allen, Nathaniel Allen and guest (left to right) at the Allen House

BOSTON'S INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY AT THE VILLAGE

For much of the 19th century, Boston was America's leading intellectual center, where the most prominent figures in the nations's cultural life appeared. Though older by some 20 years than Nathaniel Allen, members of the generation active here between 1820 and 1880 were among the circle of mentors and friends who came to visit or corresponded with him during the more-than-half-century Allen spent as a resident of West Newton.

Loosely characterized as the "Transcendentalists," Boston's intellectual community included many divergent personalities whose concerns ranged from the intense individualism of authors Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne and the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, to the political involvement of Abolitionists and reformers, and the rationalist religion of William Ellery Channing and Theodore Parker. Prolific essayists, novelists and correspondents, they operated in a close network of joint projects and mutual friendships.

Horace Mann's move to West Newton Hill in 1845 marked the initial appearance of Boston's intellectual community at West Newton. Soon to follow were Elizabeth Peabody, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Theodore Parker and Lydia Maria Child, who bought or rented homes in the village during the early 1850's. They brought many distinguished visitors to the village, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853) and a frequent guest at the Childs' farm, and her sister Catherine Beecher, who stayed with the Mann family.

Elizabeth Peabody (1804-1894) had lived briefly in West Newton during 1838 and returned in 1850 to a farm on West Newton Hill near Otis Street (Fig. 8). A noted teacher and author, she was the sister of Mary Peabody, Horace Mann's wife. A charter member of the Transcendental Club (1836) and an associate of William Ellery Channing, Miss Peabody is perhaps best known as a leader of the American kindergarten movement.

Fig. 8 Elizabeth Peabody (1804-1894)

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), one of America's foremost 19th century novelists, wrote The Blithedale Romance at West Newton during the winter of 1851-1852. Hawthorne and his wife, Sophia Peabody, occupied the Mann residence at Chestnut and Highland Streets.

Theodore Parker (1810-1860), a prominent Unitarian minister and theologian, spent summers at a West Newton Hill farm during the early 1850's. A noted spokesman for social reform, Parker worked for the improvement of prisons and factory conditions, as well as the antislavery cause.

Lydia Maria Child (1800-1878) and her husband David Lee Child moved to a farmhouse on Chestnut Street at the edge of the village in 1850. The Childs were important members of the Abolitionist movement. A prolific writer, Mrs. Child published the first book against slavery in 1833.

West Newton's easy access to the cultural life and literary and political circles of Boston undoubtedly attracted this small coterie to the village. Despite its close proximity to Boston, West Newton in the 1840's and 1850's was still essentially rural in character, a factor that probably appealed to an intellectual community well known for its strong preference for the countryside.

There was a pronounced undercurrent of antiurbanism in the writings of the Transcendentalists. Brook Farm, their famous experiment in communal living at West Roxbury, was formed in part in reaction to the materialism and competition they felt was endemic to the nation's industrial cities. Theodore Parker, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Elizabeth Peabody participated in Brook Farm for a time during the 1840's, and both Parker and Miss Peabody were instrumental in formulating the dream of a self-sufficient, cooperative farm and intellectual community. All, however, left within a few years, disillusioned with its personality conflicts and the demanding upkeep of the farm.

In West Newton's quiet rural setting, the West Roxbury community's refugees could rest and write without the distractions and responsibilities of maintaining a farm. Theodore Parker, in particular, often wrote of the regenerative quality of the countryside and looked forward to his summer stay at the village. Describing the pleasures of his summer farm to friends, he wrote in 1852:

> Out here I have got the comfort of the cattle; and the old horse knows me... The great long-horned oxen are pets of mine. The Pic is one of my favorites also; and I speak to him every morning, noon, and night, and he answers me.

Horace Mann and his family also delighted in West Newton, in their new house with its veranda that overlooked the village center, and the neighborly community at their "beautiful country town." Mrs. Mann wrote her sister, Sophia Hawthorne, in 1848:

> We did not envy the shining halls of the city, for there was a feeling of permanence, of stability, in short, that was inexpressibly satisfactory.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, her brother-in-law, found West Newton far less satisfying. The Mann's fashionable residence, with its "modern" indoor plumbing and central heating, was a constant source of

complaint. Local well-wishers, accustomed to the hospitality of the Manns, met a locked door when Hawthorne was here, shut against distractions to his story of the Brook Farm community, The Blithedale Romance. The Hawthorne family moved to Concord immediately after the book was completed.

In Hawthorne and His Wife, A Biography (1884), Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel's son, recalled the family's unhappy stay at the village. "A more dismal and unlovely suburb than West Newton was in the winter of 1851 could not exist outside New England," he wrote. "It stood upon a low rise of land, shelving down to a railway, along which smoky trains screeched and rumbled from morning to night." This dreary picture of West Newton has unfortunately been repeated by virtually all of the famous author's biographers.

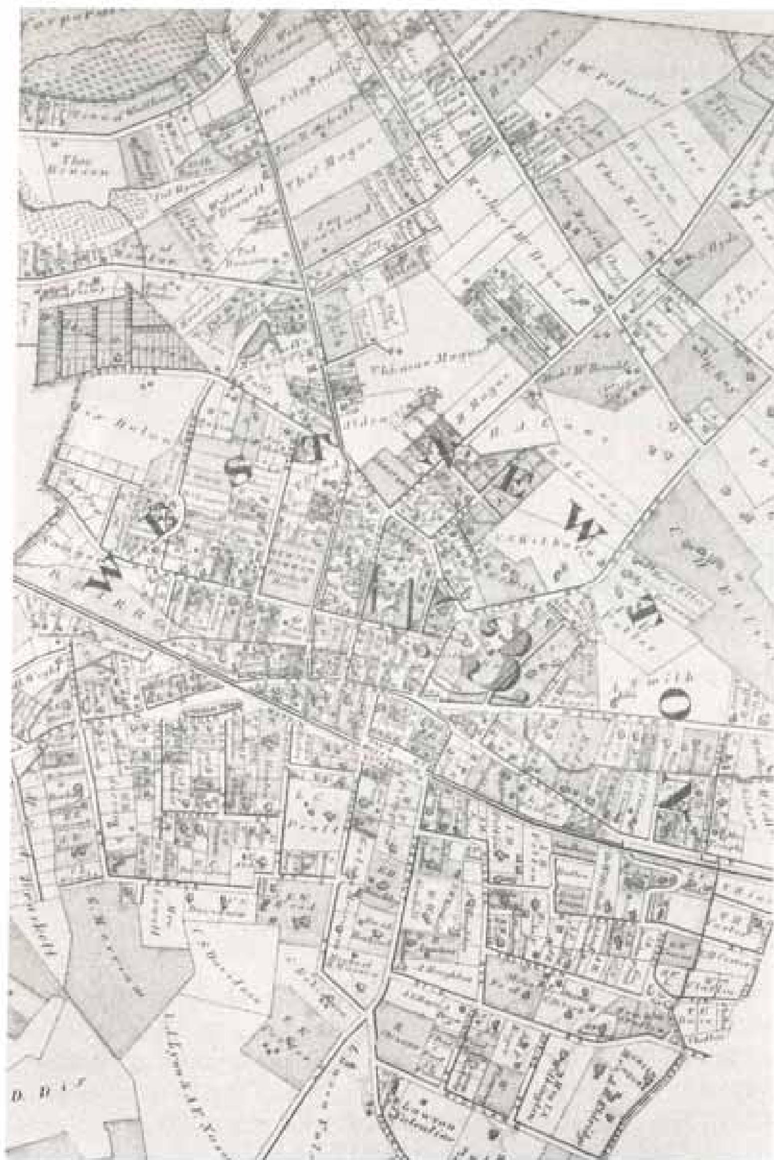
Lydia Maria Child came to West Newton for a rest from her work on behalf of the Abolitionists and to write. With her husband, she took up residence outside the village at a farm that had been purchased for them by a supporter of the antislavery cause. Despite the fact that she finished two books during her stay here, Mrs. Child became disillusioned with the rocky farm, its constant maintenance, and her recurring illnesses, and the family moved to Wayland in 1852.

Although West Newton was the home of these distinguished people for but a short time, the community retained its reputation for progressive political views and lively interest in reform, education and the arts. As Lucy Allen wrote in West Newton a Half a Century Ago (1917) about life in the village, "... once the good man appears, his power is irresistible and such was the case in West Newton some half a century ago, when there came to this village such men and women as most of us have heard of, since childhood."

POST-CIVIL WAR GROWTH

The sleepy village of the 1850's was not to endure much beyond the decade that spanned the Civil War (Fig. 9). West Newton's transition from a small country hamlet to a prosperous suburb was accomplished in the years between 1865 and 1900. Its population more than doubled in this period, from 2,400 residents in 1870 to 5,500 at the end of the century. Despite this rapid growth, the village remained essentially a community of tree-lined streets and homes. There were no major factories within its boundaries and the commercial district, which served only the local population, remained small in scale.

The Boston & Albany Railroad depot functioned as a meeting point between West Newton's central neighborhoods and West Newton Hill, serving increasing numbers of Boston-bound commuters through the end of the 19th century. In 1860, the station sold 75 season tickets, a figure that increased to over 200 within the next ten years. The old wood-frame depot was replaced in the 1880's with an imposing brick building, its landscaped grounds forming a fitting centerpiece for a wealthy, well-kept suburban community. Railroad-related industry in the village, such as lumberyards, coal sheds and warehousing, lay between Border and Crescent Streets near the B & A freight house.



The village's institutions—its churches, town hall, school, major businesses and fraternal organizations—lined a four-block area on the north side of Washington Street between Watertown and Elm Streets. Around 1860, the business section consisted of a row of separate wood-frame buildings clustered near the railroad station. Major investment in the area occurred in the following decade, when two large brick commercial blocks were built on Washington Street for offices, shops, meeting halls and banks.

The variety and number of stores in the village center in 1890 presents a good picture of the prosperity of its residents and the services required by a population of 5,000 people near the end of the 19th century. At or near Washington Street were a yard goods store, a tailor, clothing store, banks, plumbers, a photographer, fish market, laundry, hardware, an undertaker, several printers, painters and upholsterers, a harness company, the village blacksmith and a telegraph office. West Newton's business district remained small in scale, however, as many residents apparently preferred to do their extensive shopping in Boston's downtown department stores.

Today, very little survives in West Newton Square from the village's 19th century commercial area. In addition to the Davis Hotel (1831), the old

Fig. 9 Plan, West Newton (1874)

Fig. 10 Watertown Street at Washington Street, looking east; Robinson Block (left), Davis Hotel (right)

Robinson Block (1878), now covered with metal siding, still stands at the intersection of Watertown and Washington Streets (Fig. 10).

The congregational and Unitarian churches both predated the Civil War. By 1871, West Newton's Roman Catholic population had grown sufficiently to support a church, and they purchased a tract of land at Washington and Prospect Streets for the new St. Bernard's parish. The original brick building burned in 1889, and was replaced the following year by the present church.

The Baptist congregation, founded in 1865, built a wood-frame church at Perkins Street, just beyond the business district in 1871. The building faced Lincoln Park, a large, green oval that was destroyed for the Massachusetts Turnpike interchange in the early 1960's. It still retains the name Lincoln Park Baptist Church.

Myrtle Baptist Church, an affiliate of the Lincoln Park congregation, serves West Newton's Black community. The congregation, founded in 1874, built at Curve Street a small wood-frme structure that was replaced in 1897, when the original structure was destroyed by fire. The congregation had some 50 members in 1890.

Curve Street, and the Myrtle Baptist Church, became the nucleus of the village's Black community. The neighborhood, which also included Hicks and Douglass Streets, was known as "The Village."

Although a few Blacks arrived here prior to the Civil War, the influx of West Newton's Black population apparently occurred between 1880 and 1900, with steady growth continuing into the 20th century. Although they came from as far as the South and Midwest, a substantial number probably moved to the village from Boston-area Black neighborhoods in Charlestown and the back side of Beacon Hill.

Black families may have chosen to settle in West Newton because of its reputation as a liberal community. Abolitionist sentiment was strong among many of its leading citizens, particularly Nathaniel Allen, who was active in the antislavery movement. The village apparently served as a station on the Underground Railway, whose participants concealed runaway slaves on their way to freedom in Canada.

Although exact population figures for the Black community in West Newton are unknown, it had grown to over 60 families by the early 20th century. Membership in the Myrtle Baptist Church fluctuated in later years, but ranged upward to 200 people until the early 1960's, when a portion of the village along Hicks and Douglass Streets was destroyed for the Massachusetts Turnpike.

West Newton Hill's development dates primarily from the decades between the Civil War and the beginning of the 20th century. Although its farms have disappeared and some of the larger estates along Chestnut and Highland Streets broken up, the Hill's northern slope appears today much as it did in the late 19th century (Fig. 11). Writing of the Hill in King's Handbook of Newton (1889), M.F. Sweetser noted, "Along this noble terrace are many modern houses, some of them very attractive, and a few almost grotesque in their forms and colors." This latter comment refers to the area's rich Victorian architecture, which is much admired today.

Most of West Newton Hill was laid out after 1860. The major streets on its front slope—Hillside and Highland Avenues, as well as Putnam, Perkins, Mount Vernon and Shaw Streets— were accepted as part of Newton's road system prior to 1875.

The Hill became the home of wealthy manufacturers and professional men, most of whom commuted to offices in downtown Boston. Many were associated with the garment industry—as wool and cotton dealers, yard-goods wholesalers and clothing manufacturers—although college professors, lawyers, financiers and stockbrokers, as well as coal, lumber and ship suppliers made their homes here.

Fig. 11 Highland Street near Washington Street, with West Newton Hill in the background

The larger estates, surrounded by manicured lawns and ornamental gardens, lined Chestnut and Highland Streets, along with Temple and Otis Streets at the crest of the Hill. Smaller homes with less extensive lots generally appeared on the secondary connecting streets at the Hill's northern face.

One attraction of West Newton Hill was its pleasant view across the valley toward Waltham and the Charles River. The porches, gardens and roofline towers of many hillside residences were oriented toward this scenic northern vista. In a rather typical, if effusive, quote appearing in King's Handbook (1889), James Allen said of the view from the heights:

> No one who at noon of summer has rested the weary sight with the thick masses of

> foliage that, in their luxuriance, partly hide the distant hamlets or nearer dwellings on every side—or again, in autumn time, has caught the reflection of the setting sun in the gorgeously arrayed colors of these same masses of foliage—no such privileged person, I say, need sigh for Naples before he dies.

The flatlands that formed part of this panorama, stretching northward from the village center toward Waltham and to Auburndale on the west, became the home of West Newton's workingmen in the Civil War era. Cherry, Lexington, River and Pine Streets, as well as Auburndale Avenue, were lined with the peaked roofs of their small cottages. A few side streets, notably Smith and Oak Avenues, had been built up, but much of the interior land area remained open field, marsh and meadow.

The Irish population, who formed the majority of West Newton's workingmen, can be traced to the 1840's, although their arrival at the village may date to the previous decade. Tradition places the first Irish settlers in West Newton with the construction crews that built the Boston & Worcester Railroad.

The port of Boston served as a major entry point for Irish immigrants beginning in 1834. Driven from their homes in Ireland by crop failures and evictions by English landlords, 35,000 Irishmen fled to Boston during the peak years of immigration between 1845 and 1855. The majority of West Newton's Irish population, however, arrived after the Civil War. By 1885 the village had 746 foreign-born residents, the vast majority of them from Ireland.

A few Irishmen established small farms in the northern section of the village and near Auburndale Avenue, although most took up other occupations here. Irish immigrants were heavily represented in the building trades, working as masons, carpenters or day laborers in construction. Others found employment as wagon drivers, or as operators of the horse-drawn cabs that met each train, and a sizeable number worked as gardeners, coachmen or servants at the large estates. Late in the 19th century, many had become tradesmen, clerks, policemen and landlords. Residents of the village's northern neighborhoods along Derby Street and Adams Avenue often crossed into Waltham to work as skilled laborers at the American Watch Company factory.

At mid-century there were a dozen Irish families at West Newton, clustered along River Street and at Auburndale Avenue. Most of those who came in the decades after the Civil War became homeowners, although it was common for newcomers to first board with an established family before buying their own plot of land. Double houses, which contained two apartments, appeared in West Newton around 1885 and often belonged to landlords, many of whom were Irish. These multi-family dwellings, however, also appealed to the owner-occupant, who was attracted by the additional income from the rental unit and the possibility of covering the family's own housing expenses with the monthly rent from a tenant.

A horse car line was built along River Street through West Newton's flatlands just after the Civil War. An account of the village in M.F. Sweetser's King's Handbook of Newton (1889) gives this description of its route:

> The horse cars will take you in a short time from the railroad station to Waltham through a region of small cottages and fields assuaged only by views of the great green hills across the Charles.

Street railways became an increasingly popular mode of transportation within Newton, their lines connecting with the railroad stations at the village centers. In 1887, the Newton Street Railway Company took over the River Street line and another route that had been built around 1880 along Washington Street (Fig. 12). Two years later, the company converted from horse-drawn cars to electric power and at about the same time, built the trolley barn that still stands at 1121 Washington Street near the West Newton Armory.

Fig. 12 Open air trolley on Washington Street near Gasometer Court (Armory Street)

The trolleys contributed to the congestion of West Newton's major streets, which had become a significant problem by the end of the 19th century. In addition, accidents and traffic tieups were a frequent occurrence along the streets that crossed the railroad tracks at the village center, where a gate tender stopped all traffic to let the trains through. In a massive civic improvement project in the mid 1890's, by the Boston and Albany Railroad, the state, and the city, the four B & A tracks through West Newton's commercial district were lowered and bridges built to connect the area's north-south streets. Although this program caused major rebuilding and street realignment in Newton Corner, it resulted in little disruption to businesses in West Newton's village center.

THE 20TH CENTURY

As West Newton entered the 20th century, the village was in the midst of a land boom. Open fields at the north, and former estates in the northeastern section near Waltham Street, were divided into house lots. Most of this activity occurred between 1890 and 1910, although the area was not substantially developed until about 1930. West Newton Hill, however, had been almost entirely built up by 1920, with most new construction after that date appearing on lots that had been parceled from large estates.

The population of West Newton nearly doubled, from 5,500 at the beginning of the century, to 10,500 in 1940, with the fastest growth occurring during the 1920's. With the influx of new residents there was a corresponding rise in the school-age popula-

tion. In 1920, the district was served by the Peirce School, built in 1896 as a replacement for the old Peirce School on Washington Street, the Davis School, and the Franklin School on River Street. A new, larger facility for the Davis School was built in 1922 and the Franklin School at Derby Street was erected in 1939.

The composition of West Newton's population underwent major change after World War I, as increasing numbers of Italians moved to the village. Although Nonantum, an industrial center, became their focus of settlement, West Newton had acquired a few Italian residents as early as the 1890's. The Italians' arrival in West Newton was slow yet steady, with approximately 60 families making their homes in the village prior to 1914.

Italian immigration to the Boston area followed that of the Irish by about 40 years. As late as 1880, there were only 1,200 Italian-born residents in the North End, Boston's receiving area for immigrant groups. This number increased to 7,700 by 1895, and following the peak years of Italian immigration, rose to 36,000 in 1920. Most of the new arrivals came from the farming and mountain districts of southern Italy, a region whose oppressive land taxes, poor crops and burgeoning population gave impetus to the mass migration that was in many respects similar to that of the Irish in the 19th century.

Unlike the village of Nonantum, West Newton had little to offer in the way of factory jobs. Most of the village's early Italian residents were self-employed as grocers, fruit vendors, shoemakers, masons and barbers, although not a few worked as day laborers in construction.

The area's first Italians lived at or near Auburndale Avenue, in the same district that had originally been settled by the Irish immigrants of the 1850's. At first they were primarily tenants, though by the First World War, clusters of Italian homeowners appeared at Oak Avenue, Alden, Cottage and Mague Place, as well as the Border Street neighborhood near the railroad tracks. In the 1920's, increasing numbers of Italians bought homes in the River and Webster Street neighborhoods, as well as along Auburndale Avenue. Today, the village has a large population of Italian descent.

West Newton's business district underwent major renovation during the teens and twenties, when its older wood-frame buildings were cleared for the long, single-story commercial blocks that remain a familiar feature of West Newton Square. Housing a series of shops, each with a large window display area at the front, these buildings supplanted the old multi-story, multi-use character of the village's 19th century commercial area.

The automobile also had an impact on the village center, as gas stations, a car showroom and auto repair shops appeared on Washington Street during the 1920's. At the beginning of this decade there were almost 1,000 cars owned by West Newton residents and, by its close, the trolley lines, their clientele dwindling with the increased use of the automobile, were falling on hard times.

The block on Washington Street between Waltham and Cherry Streets had been the core of West Newton village during the 19th century. This area saw considerable change in the first few decades of the 1900's. In 1906 the Unitarian congregation

built a new church, designed by the internationally-renowned architectural firm of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, and replaced the old Allen School at Washington and Highland Streets. The Congregational Church moved to Chestnut Street on West Newton Hill in 1916, selling its old building to the City for an annex to City Hall. The obsolete, wood-frame City Hall and annex were in turn demolished in the mid-1930's when new municipal offices were constructed on Commonwealth Avenue at Newton Centre. The site of the old City Hall, at the corner of Cherry and Washington Streets, is now a park, with the adjacent land occupied by the Newton Police Department and the Newton District Court.

Built in the early 1960's along the old Boston & Albany railroad tracks, the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension brought significant change to the village center. The multi-lane expressway and its interchange at West Newton further isolated West Newton Hill and the neighborhoods bordering the western section of Washington Street from the business district, land taken for its construction resulted in the loss of Lincoln Park at Putnam and Perkins Streets, as well as many homes that had been part of the area's Black community.

II. *Looking at Architecture*

Designs for the vast majority of West Newton's residences were the product of local builders, contractors and house carpenters. Architects were responsible for only the largest and most complex of the area's buildings, primarily its churches and most elaborate residences.

This is not to imply that the local carpenter-builder was incapable of performing work of a relatively high level of sophistication. Essentially a craftsman, he was highly competent in practical matters like framing systems, which during the 19th century included not only the building's basic internal structure, but also 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. 13). These handbooks of sample floor plans, house designs and ornamental trim were widely published by architects and builders throughout the 19th century. Often a builder and potential homeowner reviewed these books together, selecting elements from several illustrations to be incorporated into a new design.

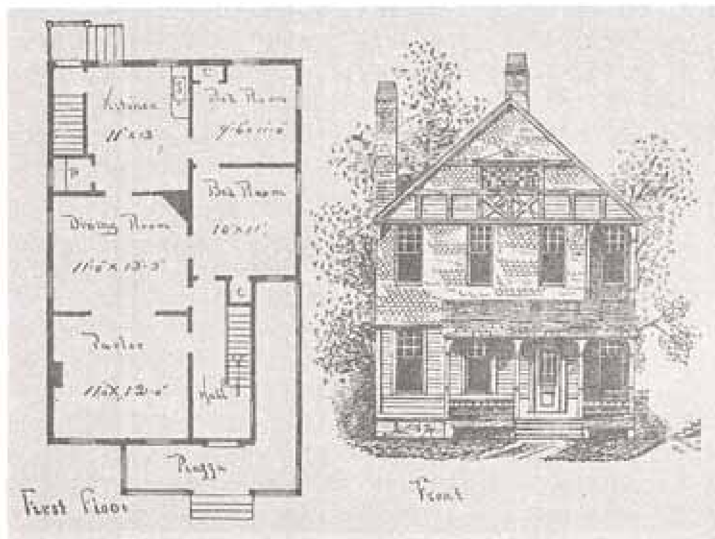


Fig. 13 House plan, *Palliser's New Cottage Architecture* (1887)

Many houses in West Newton were custom built in this manner, with the owner playing some 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. George Haynes, a builder active in the village during the late 19th century, had an unusual system for realizing a profit from his carpentry skills. About eight houses near the village center can be attributed to Haynes, who built them separately, occupying one while the next was in progress. When the new residence was complete, Haynes moved his family there and sold off his former house, presumably at a small profit.

As the demand for housing in West Newton rose dramatically during the 1840's, carpenter-builders began moving to the village. Although local men found ready employment here, such as David Bartlett of Newton Centre who built the Horace Mann house, the newcomers were responsible for a large share of the new construction. The Lucas family, active beginning in the 1840's, is typical. Several houses near the village center and the front slope of West Newton Hill can be traced to various members of this family, as can the larger commissions of remodeling the old Congregational church into the Town Hall, and designing the first Peirce School on Washington Street.

Warren Davis, another carpenter who apparently migrated to the village, may be more typical of West Newton's carpenter-builders during the Civil War era. Active during the 1860's and 1870's, Davis sometimes worked with local real estate developers, but also built on lots that he owned, and occasionally retained a house as rental property. His buildings are found primarily in the River Street-Henshaw Street neighborhood, although evidently he worked elsewhere in Newton. The Warren Davis residence still stands at 37 River Street.

Many Irish immigrants in the village were employed as carpenters and masons, although they frequently operated on a much smaller scale than other builders. Later in the century, Irish carpenters were found among the employees of large contracting firms and woodworking shops owned by M. Frank Lucas, Henry H. Hunt and William Pettigrew. Several houses, mostly modest in scale, that were built in West Newton during the last few decades of the 1800's can be attributed to these companies. Groups of lots were sometimes bought and developed by construction firms, although speculative building and the rows of similar houses it produced did not appear in the village until the 1890's, and not on a large scale until the 20th century.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Creating a house design involved a number of limiting factors. Economic constraints imposed by the income of the client, for example, reduced the design options of the builder or homeowner. Speculative builders, who constructed housing for an unknown buyer, were even more restricted in their choices. Limiting their capital risk, this class of builder frequently selected conservative designs in a few popular styles that had already found acceptance among potential homeowners.

Cultural factors played a determining role in the exterior appearance of a house as well. In every age and culture there have been shared perceptions of how a home should look and function. Although 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 a beautiful or appropriate house in a particular era. During the 19th century preferences in architectural design were expressed by ornately decorated houses that reflected a series of rapidly 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 ornamental trim, all contribute directly to its physical appearance. By examining the choices that went into making up the design for 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 this design process.

House Forms

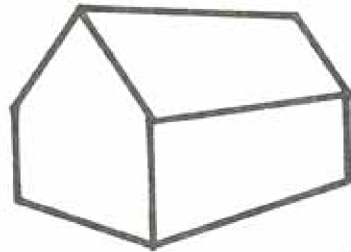


Fig. 14

The overall form of a house is most often expressed in the simple geometry of a rectangular or square block (Fig. 14).

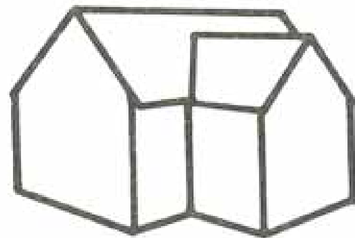


Fig. 15

This basic shape can be made more complex by adding a secondary form, or wing, to the sides or back of the house (Fig. 15).

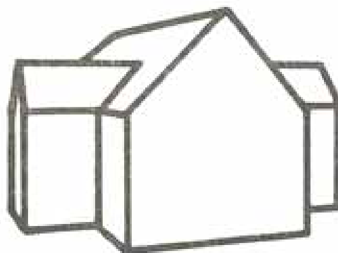


Fig. 16

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. 16).

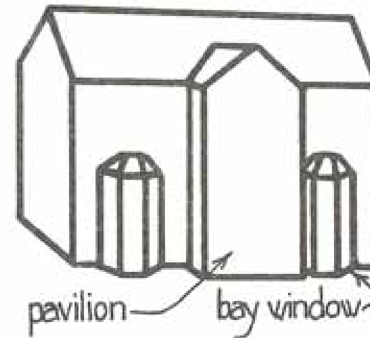


Fig. 17

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. 17).

Fig. 18

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. 18).

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. 19

In general, boxy buildings with geometrical shapes will have simple plans (Fig. 19). 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.

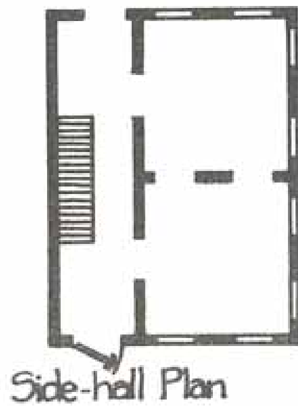


Fig. 20

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. 20).

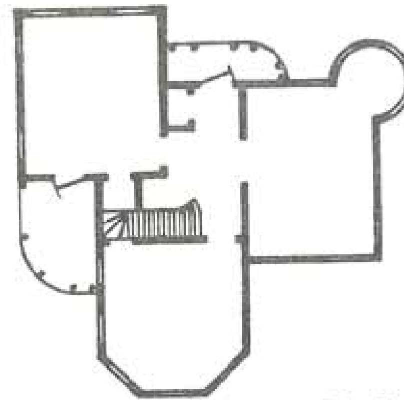


Fig. 21

In picturesque designs, and in large complex buildings, room shape and size varies and the interior spaces follow a complicated, asymmetrical pattern (Fig. 21). 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.

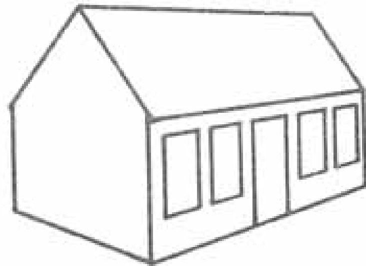


Fig. 22

In the example at the left (Fig. 22), 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.

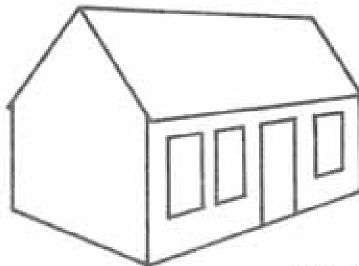


Fig. 23

An asymmetrical arrangement (Fig. 23) 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.

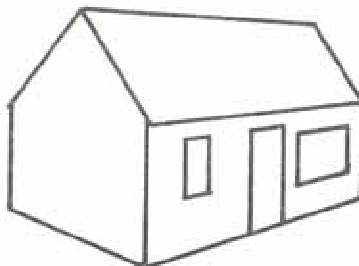


Fig. 24

Size can also govern the appearance of a building's facade (Fig. 24). The window at the right assumes much more importance in this design because its opening is larger.

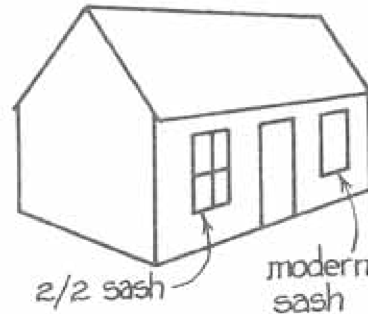


Fig. 25

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. 25).

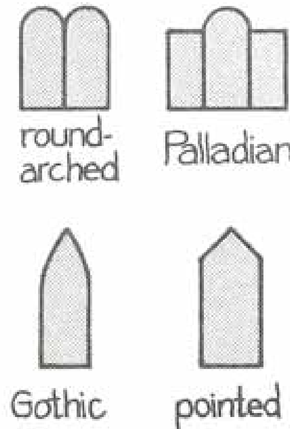


Fig. 26

In the 19th century windows assumed several shapes in addition to the standard rectangular form (Fig. 26). 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 residences in the village of West Newton in 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.

GABLE ROOFS

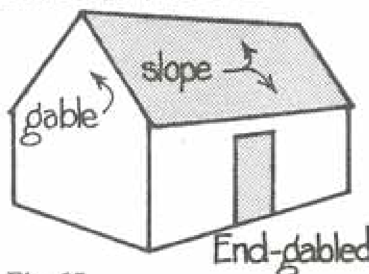


Fig. 27

Popular throughout the 19th century and very common, the gable roof (Fig. 27) 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.

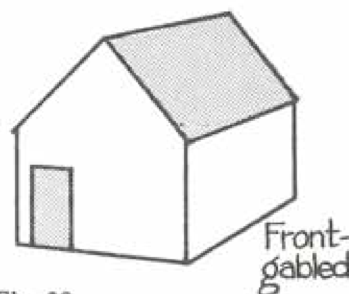


Fig. 28

Front-gabled houses had a quite different appearance (Fig. 28). They were used frequently with the side-hall plan (Fig. 20).

JERKIN ROOF

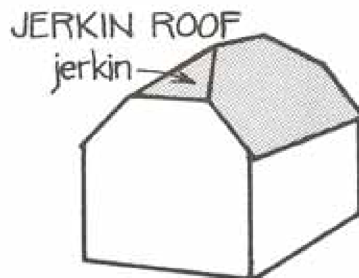


Fig. 29

The jerkin roof is closely related to the gable form, but has a triangular, backward slanting front and rear slope (Fig. 29).

GAMBREL ROOF

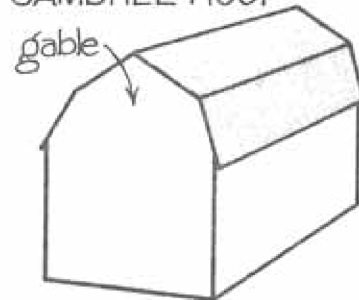


Fig. 30

Barnlike in shape, the gambrel roof has two slopes, broken into double sections, and gables (Fig. 30). It was popular during the late 1800's.

HIP ROOF

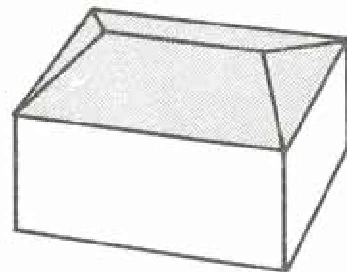


Fig. 31

The hip roof has four slopes and no gables (Fig. 31). It was used in the early 1800's and reappeared at the end of the century.

MANSARD ROOF

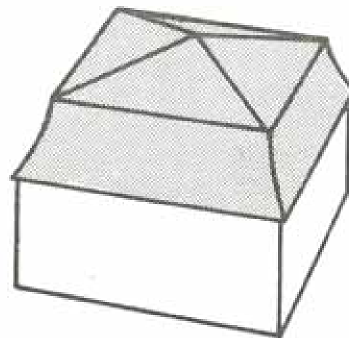
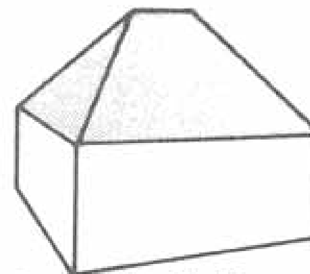


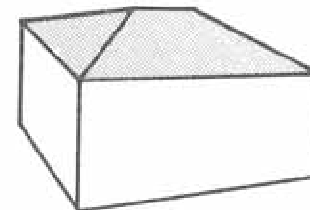
Fig. 32

A two-part hip roof, the mansard often has curving lower slopes (Fig. 32). Its heyday was between 1860 and 1880, during the so-called Mansard style.



Steep Hip Roof

Fig. 33



Low Hip Roof

Fig. 34

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. 33), just as a low roof can assume much less importance in relation to the rest of the building (Fig. 34).

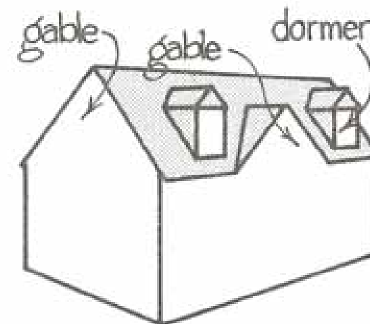


Fig. 35

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. 35).

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. 36

Ornament can be used in several ways. For example, it defines the meeting points between the walls, roof area and openings (Fig. 36). Decorative trim at these key locations includes the cornice at the eaves, cornerboards and moldings at the doors and windows.

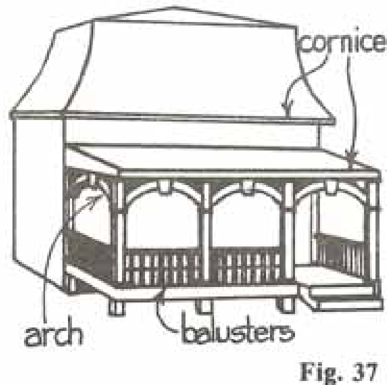


Fig. 37

Decoration is also concentrated at a building's most important design features. As an extension of the facade, the porch (Fig. 37) 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.

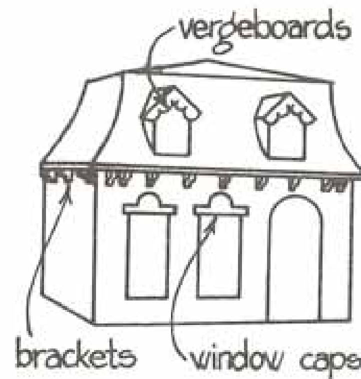


Fig. 38

Ornate trim was often applied as the final, vididualistic signature to a design. This ornament is what sets 19th century architecture apart from the modern tract house. Common forms are brackets, window caps, and vergeboards, or narrow decorative borders along the roof eaves, brackets, and window caps (Fig. 38).

Fig. 39

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. 39).

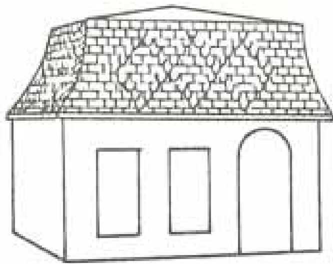


Fig. 40

In slate-covered roofs the individual slates were cut into decorative shapes and laid in intricate patterns, in much the same manner as wooden shingles (Fig. 40). 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. Home Improvement and Repair Standards, a guide published by the Newton Planning and Development Department and the Newton Upper Falls Historic District Commission, offers extensive advice for remodeling older homes. Several general rules to keep in mind are listed below.

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. 28).

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. 25).

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 rhythm, 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. 39).

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. This ornamental detail was particularly important in the Victorian period.

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 or variegated asphalt shingles tend to make the roof disappear. After 1840, in all architectural styles the roof was meant to play a prominent role and therefore should be dark in color.

III. An Architectural Guide

The village of West Newton is distinguished in both the variety and quality of its 19th century residential architecture. Essentially suburban in character, the community had a mixed population of local businessmen, wealthy Boston commuters and Irish immigrants during the mid- to late 1800's. Their individual preferences in architectural design are expressed in the rich variety of house forms and styles displayed in the village's streets and neighborhoods.

The northern section of West Newton, particularly the major streets leading from the village center to the Waltham border, became the home of the area's Irish residents. Here, neat rows of narrow, peak-roofed cottages were built by a stable population of homeowners, primarily between the Civil War years and 1910.

Owned by laborers and skilled craftsmen, the housing of this district represents a tradition that developed outside the mainstream of 19th century architectural design. It became, instead, the product of the lifestyles and income levels of its owners, as well as the ingenuity of the local builders, and it responded slowly, if at all, to changes in architectural fashion. Vernacular in character, these modest houses represent a tradition-oriented "language of the people" expressed in built form.

Houses of a more sophisticated character, which demonstrate a knowledge of contemporary architectural fashion, appear at the village center in the streets near West Newton Square. Many of the community's older homes, dating from the mid-1800's, were built

here, primarily for a middle class population of local store owners, professional men and Boston office workers and businessmen.

In the years following the Civil War, West Newton Hill became the province of West Newton's wealthier residents. Involved for the most part in small-scale manufacturing, wholesaling and finance, they built estates and large, ornate homes that represent the village's fullest expression of architectural style. It was in this area of tree-shaded streets and ornamental gardens that West Newton's reputation during the 19th century as a prosperous suburb for the newly-rich was based.

Linked with Boston by a commuter rail line, West Newton became essentially suburban in scale and setting after 1840. The railroad suburb was a new development of the mid-1800's—a small town tied through its residents to the aspirations, values and lifestyles of a sophisticated urban center, yet in ambience and appearance similar to a country village.

The typical suburban house was wood frame in construction, like America's earlier farmhouses and village dwellings, but designed with an imposing street facade and ostentatious front entrance. A trend toward picturesque architecture, first appearing in the 1840's, coincided with the development of the suburban house form. Featuring a dramatic set of images that included imposing, jagged silhouettes, prominent rooflines and a profusion of ornate wooden decoration, "picturesque" buildings were felt to be particularly appropriate for scenic rural settings such as West Newton Hill. West Newton's Boston commuter population apparently admired the picturesque styles, but preferred less dramatic, though still ostentatious, versions for their own residences.

An essential feature of the picturesque suburb of the mid- and late 19th century was a generous house lot, planted with ornamental gardens and specimen trees. A curving drive, its entrance marked by stone posts, led to the main door of the house, and lots were fenced with low stone walls. Large lawns and gardens at several West Newton Hill estates succumbed to pressure for development and were subdivided into smaller house lots beginning in the late 19th century.

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 has its own system of ornament, a distinct vocabulary that includes 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 of 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 re-emerged 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 to the rural farming areas. As West Newton'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 various economic levels, growing less complicated 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.

West Newton's residential architecture dates primarily from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Few houses from the 1700's survive. The Samuel Wheat farmstead at 399 Waltham Street and the "Mansion House" at 432 Cherry Street are exceptions. Both of these 18th century residences have been restored to reflect their original appearance.

The Federal style of architecture, introduced after the American Revolution exists near the village center only in buildings that have been altered substantially. The best remaining example of the Federal style in West Newton is a house at 1185 Washington Street, which has been converted for commercial use. Characterized by a low roof, high chimneys, a curving fanlight over the entry and narrow panes of glass beside the door, the Federal style is well represented in Newton by the City's historical museum, the Jackson Homestead, built in 1809 at Newton Corner (Fig. 41). Federal period detailing, particularly the fanlight doorway, was copied during the Colonial Revival style at the end of the 19th century. (See pp. 52-53.)

Fig. 41 The Jackson Homestead
527 Washington Street

A description of the eight architectural styles prevalent between 1830 and 1910 in West Newton, with illustrations of representative examples of both the more complex and simpler local interpretations, follows. Vernacular housing, which developed apart from stylistic trends, is treated separately in a section on workers' dwellings in the village.

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 West Newton. Most of the remaining houses in this style can be found on Watertown, Webster and Elm Streets near the village center, in an area that developed shortly after the rail line from Boston was built.

The style first appeared in England, where new discoveries of ancient temples had heightened the interest of both architects and scholars in Greek civilization. It this country the Greek Revival style achieved the status of a national architecture, becoming predominant for commercial blocks, civic and religious buildings, residences, and even utilitarian structures like carriage barns.

The widespread appeal of the Greek Revival style lay in the often-expressed sentiment that Americans were the spiritual successors of ancient Greece. This feeling was apparent not only in the country's building stock of the pre-Civil War era, but also in the names of its newly-formed towns—Sparta, Ithaca, Athens and Attica.

The Grecian temple (Fig. 42) 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 frequently copied for residential designs, although the temple's low roof was often modified to reflect the relatively steep slopes that were then common in American houses. More sophisticated versions of the Greek Revival style usually retained the lower roof pitch.

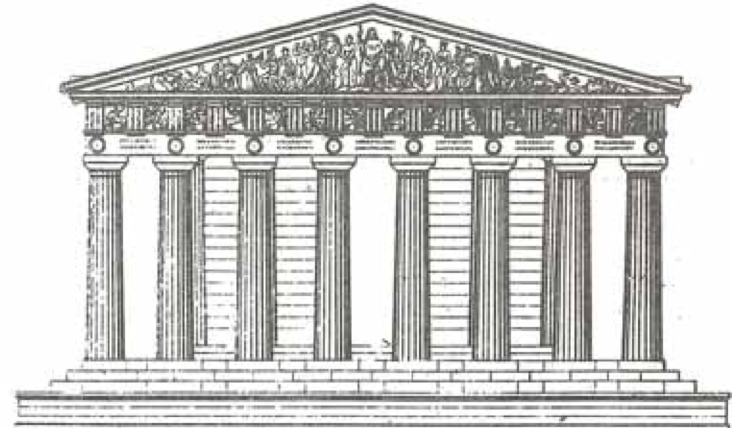


Fig. 42 The Parthenon (438 B.C.)

The temple form necessitated a rearrangement of the traditional orientation of the house, so that its narrow side faced the street. (See Fig. 28.) 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. 20.) These two changes produced the front-gabled/side hall plan house-type that remained in vogue for the rest of the century.

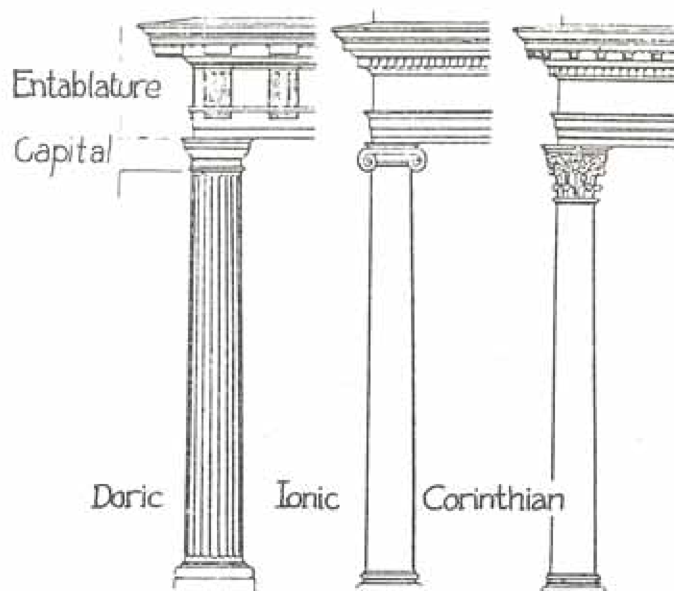


Fig. 43 The Classical Orders

The column, with its three styles of capitals and surmounting entablature (Fig. 43), was a favored form of ornament in the Greek Revival period. Both column and capital were often supplied by large lumber companies, rather than handmade by the local carpenter. A less expensive version of the column, the pilaster, could be easily constructed by nailing wide vertical boards to corners and door frames and tacking on a few moldings to suggest a capital. Similarly, a series of flat boards could be used to reproduce the classical entablature at the doorway and roofline. Many modest Greek Revival style houses in West Newton were decorated in this manner.

The Grecian temple form, with its row of porch columns, was used for more elaborate Greek Revival style residences. A well-preserved temple-fronted house, built shortly after the railroad arrived in West Newton, appears in this example on Waltham Street (Fig. 44). Two-story Ionic columns support the front pediment of this residence. Compared with the shallow slopes of Greek models, its roof takes a much steeper profile. In less ambitious versions of the Greek Revival style in West Newton, the monumental porch columns were reduced to supporting a single-story porch, and in very simple houses, omitted altogether.

There are several examples in Newton of a local variation of the Greek Revival style that places the pediment at the sides of the building and the columns across the front. One of the City's best examples of this version of the style is the Nathaniel Allen House (Fig. 45), built at the corner of Webster and Cherry Streets in 1841.

The Ionic order, favored for elaborate residences, appears in the front colonnade of the Allen House and also in its single-story side porch. Large Doric pilasters, a typical motif of the Greek Revival period, define the corners of the building, with a three-part classical entablature forming a continuous band along the roof eaves of the main part of the house.

Fig. 44 309 Waltham Street

Fig. 45 Nathaniel Allen House
35 Webster Street

Gothic Revival 1840 - 1860

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

The American public had acquired an interest in the Middle Ages through popular historical novels with medieval settings, such as Sir Walter Scott's "Waverley" series. It was not, however, until Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), a Hudson River Valley landscape architect, promoted the Gothic Revival style that this interest focused on "medieval" architecture. Downing became a leading interpreter of the new fashion for picturesque suburban cottages and country estates, accompanying his widely-read articles and books with sample house designs in scenic, landscaped settings (Fig. 46).

The Gothic Revival, one of several picturesque styles promoted by A.J. Downing and his contemporaries, marked a departure from the compact house forms, restrained decoration, and rules of symmetry imposed in classical styles, such as the Greek Revival. It typified the new picturesque fashion, with wings that projected in several directions, steep complex roofs, 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.

Fig. 46 Gothic cottage appearing in Andrew Jackson Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850)

Although it became a relatively popular style elsewhere, Gothic Revival houses were rare in Newton. West Newton has a cluster of unusual, nearly identical Gothic cottages that were part of the Webster Park development of the 1840's (Fig. 47). Conservative in design, as were many of the village's buildings from this period, these houses have little of the fanciful ar-

Fig. 47 120 Webster Street

rangement of forms that characterized more sophisticated examples of the style.

The steep, peaked gables at the front are picturesque in character, however, and the ornate wooden finery, or "gingerbread," that was introduced with the Gothic fashion is used here on a modest scale. Gothic ornament appears in the pointed arches at the gable peaks and in the decorative railing along the top of the porch at this house on Webster Street.

Italianate 1840 - 1880

The historical origins of the Italianate style can be traced to the rural architecture of northern Italy. The style was first introduced in England, again under the impetus for picturesque house designs. Its popularity was probably related to a contemporary interest in 17th century landscape paintings, many of which illustrated romantic Italian country villas.

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

A low, sometimes hipped, roof with extended eaves was an important part 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 common feature of the Italianate. These windows often appear in pairs, outlined by prominent moldings that trace the curving upper profile of the arch.

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. Porch posts in this period were square and rather plain, although

Fig. 48 114 Temple Street

Fig. 49 15 Davis Avenue

they, too, succombed to the fashion for fanciful forms used later in the Victorian era.

West Newton has many examples of Italianate design. The style was popular for elaborate houses, including some built in the early development of West Newton Hill, as well as for small cottages. Picturesque towers and other avant-garde features of the Italianate mode, however, found little favor in West Newton, where most of the remaining buildings in the style are relatively conservative.

Unlike the more complex Gothic Revival, the Italianate could be readily adapted by local builders, who added rows of ornate brackets to the already familiar front- and end-gabled house forms. Two local variations in the detailing of Italianate houses are the use of tooth-like blocks, or dentils, in place of brackets, and paired first-story bay windows at the side walls.

The Italianate style enjoyed a long span of popularity in West Newton that lasted until the late 1870's. Typical of the community's more elaborate Italianate residences is this house on West Newton Hill (Fig. 48). Its plain front walls are interrupted at the center by a shallow, roofed projection, a common Italianate period device known as a central pavilion. Bracketing appears at the roof eaves, the front porch and windows.

Though modest in scale, this house (Fig. 49) and its near-twin at 3 Davis Avenue, built during the mid-1850's, are good examples of West Newton's narrow-fronted Italianate style houses. Small paired brackets are used near the roof and over the windows of this building.

Mansard 1855 - 1880

Regardless of the derivation of a building's decorative ornament, it is Mansard in style if it has a mansard roof. Essentially a hybrid form, the style borrowed round-arched windows, bracketing, boxed porch posts and its interior floor plans from the Italianate. In West Newton, Gothic Revival details were incorporated in some Mansard style houses as well.

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 more headroom in the attic, adding an extra useable floor to many buildings. In some instances a new mansard roof was added to an older house for this specific purpose.

The roof 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 in 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 François Mansart, a 17th century architect, "la mansarde" derived from a provincial French roof form. The mansard reappeared during the Second Empire under Napoleon III (1852-1870), when it was used in the enlargement of the Louvre palace during the 1850's. In this country the

Fig. 50 129 Chestnut Street

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's Old 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 suburban communities such as West Newton. Local builders apparently adopted the new roof form about 1860, and continued to build large numbers of Mansard residences here until the late 1870's. Both West Newton Hill and the residential streets near the

Fig. 51 20 Hunter Street

village center contain many examples of the style. A pronounced curve to the lower roof slope and segmental dormers formed a popular combination for Mansard style houses built around the time of the Civil War. This large residence, built in 1873 on Chestnut Street, still occupies the extensive grounds that were once typical of West Newton Hill estates (Fig. 50).

A charming variation of the style, the Mansard cottage, is well represented in West Newton. Steep roofs with shallow dormers, allowing a full extra floor, were preferred in smaller houses. An unusual feature of these cottages is their elaborate trim, which was invariably scaled down to more modest proportions in smaller versions of other styles.

Built by one of the Lucas brothers, a family of local carpenters who apparently designed several of the village's Mansard buildings, this house at Hunter Street (Fig. 51) is West Newton's best remaining Mansard cottage. Its thin, paired porch posts, scrolled brackets and cutout designs at the base of the porch and steps are unusually good examples of the fanciful sawn woodwork that characterizes Victorian-era trim.

Stick Style 1865 - 1890

The Stick Style is a more picturesque contemporary of the Mansard and Italianate styles. In West Newton, which has many good examples, it was popular among the Boston commuters who lived on West Newton Hill.

The style's complicated roofs, decorated wall surfaces and multi-part plans can be seen as an extension of the more picturesque versions of the Gothic Revival style. Gothic detailing, particularly the intricate wooden vergeboards that hang from the roof eaves, were sometimes incorporated in Stick Style designs.

Fig. 52 39 Putnam Street

The central feature of the style is a network of thin, flat boards applied over a clapboard wall, 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 West Newton houses it was confined to simple horizontal boards that crossed at each floor level and at the tops and sills of the window frames. The jerkin roof, which has a clipped front peak, was also a common feature of West Newton's Stick Style residences.

This West Newton Hill residence (Fig. 52) exhibits many characteristics of the style, including steep Gothic roof profiles and vergeboards at the porch and dormer eaves, a system of intersecting stickwork on the walls, and a jerkin roof. Built in the late 1870's, the house is one of West Newton's most sophisticated Stick Style designs.

Queen Anne 1875 - 1910

The energy and inventiveness of the Queen Anne style gave full expression to the picturesque forms that had been an undercurrent in American architecture beginning in the 1840's. Most often, Queen Anne designs were eclectic, drawing from several sources for inspiration. For example, architects relied on contemporary British decorative arts, medieval cottages and town houses and, toward the end of the style's popularity, American colonial architecture for decorative motifs.

The style's 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). It received widespread publicity in this country at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadephia through the popular British pavilions, whose Queen Anne design caught the imagination of the American public. Architectural pattern books featuring the Queen Anne style were rushed into print, and within four years after the Centennial many new suburban homes appeared with all the trappings of the latest fashion. The Queen Anne made its first appearance in West Newton during the late 1870's.

Queen Anne style 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 period played on the contrast of materials as well as

Fig. 53 44 Putnam Street

forms. It is not unusual to find brick, stone, clapboards, plain or patterned wood shingles, stucco, and intricate molded plaster or clay panels within a single house.

The Queen Anne style is well represented in West Newton. Local versions range from elaborate architect-designed residences on West Newton Hill to the comfortable builder-designed houses that appear on Watertown, Eddy and Parsons Streets and Eden Avenue. In its simplest expression, the style's ornate trim is reduced to a front porch with curving posts and a wall surface divided between clapboards and patterned shingles.

There is remarkable variety in the designs for West Newton's Queen Anne houses of the 1880's and 1890's, especially in their ornamental details. These include long front porches with table-leg shaped supports and ornate railings, textured walls of clapboards and shingles, complex rooflines with several dormers and gable-roofed projections, and towers, which provide the focal point for what sometimes seems a confusing array of shapes and forms.

Built during the mid-1880's, this house on Putnam Street (Fig. 53) gives a good picture of the rich variety of surface trim that characterized Queen Anne design. Particularly notable are its ornate double-level porch and the corner tower with its high, curving roof. Several variations on this design can be found throughout West Newton Hill.

Toward the end of the 19th century the Queen Anne style's exhuberance was toned down, as designers worked more closely from medieval models, particularly the town houses in the English Tudor period of the 16th century. In this later period, projections were pulled in and walls stripped of balconies and towers, resulting in a quiet facade relieved by a series of balanced, secondary roofs, and a simplified porch.

Fig. 54 273 Otis Street

Half-timbering, which has intersecting wall boards over a plaster or wooden surface, was introduced during this later phase of the Queen Anne, although plain wall surfaces were more often the rule. This house at Otis Street (Fig. 54), with its banks of small-paned windows and steep roofs, characterizes the introduction of English medieval architecture to West Newton Hill.

Shingle Style 1885 - 1910

The Shingle Style evolved from the Queen Anne style and shares with it an informal appearance and freedom in the arrangement of its interior spaces. The first truly American style, it developed from the early, rambling farmhouses of the New England region (Fig. 55). The barn-like gambrel roof that characterized many of these buildings became a popular feature of the Shingle Style, which also adopted more formal aspects of 18th century colonial architecture, such as the columned porch.

The hallmark of the Shingle Style is the use of natural or brown-stained wooden shingles as a wall covering. The style was popular in New England seacoast resorts, where shingled walls, often used with rough-surfaced stone, were particularly suited to the seaside air and rocky maritime scenery. The Shingle Style also appeared in suburban settings, where it often became more formal and conservative. West Newton Hill has many good examples of the more formal version of the style.

Fig. 55 399 Waltham Street

Wood shingling covered not only the walls of these houses, but often the roof, corners, porch posts, brackets and curving sides of the windows 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, more restful appearance. Decorative detail was similarly sedate, and generally confined to porch columns, bay windows, large dormers and rows of small windows. In the most progressive examples of the style, ornamental trim was purged of all historical references, the busy wooden detail of previous eras being entirely eliminated.

The Shingle Style was confined primarily to large residences or to the more ambitious forms of middle class housing. It rarely filtered down to the modest dwellings erected to stock plans by local builders, who seemed to prefer to work within the Queen Anne mode. At this level of building design, however, the uniform wood-shingled surface was adapted, particularly after the turn of the century.

Fig. 56 87 Highland Street

Wood-shingled houses appeared on West Newton Hill during the early 1890's. Many, however, were complex, irregular designs more closely tied to the Queen Anne style. More typical of the quiet effect conveyed by the Shingle Style is this house of 1895 (Fig. 56), which has broad gambrel roofs, continuous expanses of wall surface, broken only by shallow projections, and small-paned windows that appear in pairs.

Colonial Revival 1890 - 1910

After the Centennial year, American architects began to examine their own heritage. The first result of this interest became apparent in designs for Shingle Style buildings. As the decade of the eighties drew to a close, the preoccupation with 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 pristine, austere houses of the early 1700's, and demanded versions of the later, more elaborate 18th century house designs (Fig. 57). With millwork machines close at hand, Colonial Revival builders could easily re-create the new style with the same profusion of detail that had characterized earlier Victorian styles. The scale of the buildings was also altered to reflect the accepted notion of the appropriate size for a comfortable house, which by modern standards seems unusually large. Thus the narrow fanlight 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 from the Federal period, elaborate eaves moldings, railings, urns and Palladian windows, an 18th century motif using an arched center window flanked by two narrower openings.

Fig. 57 Longfellow House (1759)
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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

Fig. 58 99 Highland Street

The Colonial Revival style was popular in many Newton villages, notably Newton Corner. In West Newton, however, its more rustic and picturesque contemporary, the Shingle Style, apparently had a much stronger appeal.

The typical Colonial Revival house in West Newton had a boxy, self-contained shape (Fig. 58), usually capped by a broad hip roof, although the gable and gambrel forms were also used. The rules of balance and symmetry were observed on its front, with the entrance occupying a central position and often emphasized by a columned porch. In many Colonial Revival designs the center part of the facade extends out in a shallow projection outlined with two-story pilasters, with the upper-level windows receiving special decorative emphasis.

Workers' Housing

Nineteenth century architectural styles found expression primarily in housing for the upper and middle classes, although ornamental trim associated with the currently fashionable styles sometimes appeared in the modest workers' homes of West Newton's northern neighborhoods. 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 wooden 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 on 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 West Newton. 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. 27,28) and had two standard alternatives for floor plans (Figs. 19,20). The typical worker's cottage had two side-by-side first floor rooms and a small, central entry area, or back-to-back rooms with an offset front entry.

The local carpenter played a key role in the development of workers' housing. A large proportion of the workingmen in West Newton, particularly those of Irish descent, were employed in the construction trades. In the housing they built for the area's wealthier residents, West Newton carpenters found several features that could be adapted for their own dwellings and those of their neighbors. It is this ingenious system of borrowing that which seemed suitable, discarding the 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 West Newton architecture, and in the study of architectural history as a whole.

CENTER-ENTRY PLAN TYPES

The small, end-gabled cottages that had been introduced in Newton by the 1830's were to remain popular for workers' housing until several decades after the Civil War. This house type (Fig. 59) is found in other Boston-area communities, such as Cambridge, and in early industrial villages scattered throughout New England.

Though probably first developed by Yankee carpenters, these modest 1½ and two-story cottages were associated for the most part with the Irish workingmen who moved to West Newton just prior to the Civil War. Concentrations of early workers' houses dating from the 1850's through the 1870's are found at Pine and River Streets, as well as Smith Avenue, Derby Street and Cherry Place.

Fig. 59 250 Webster Street

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. 60). 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 while single gable windows lit the upper bedroom level of the house.

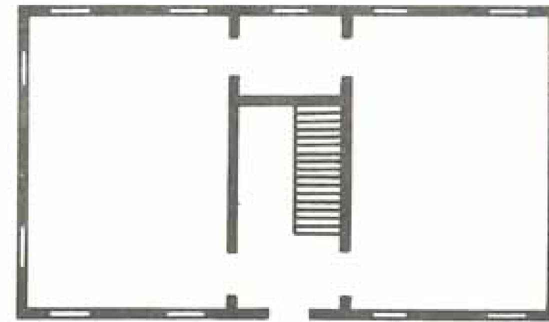


Fig. 60

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, producing very little headroom in the attic. In kneewall buildings, the framing was carried several feet above the first floor ceiling to allow a short vertical wall area in the attic rooms before the roof began its inward slope (Fig. 61).

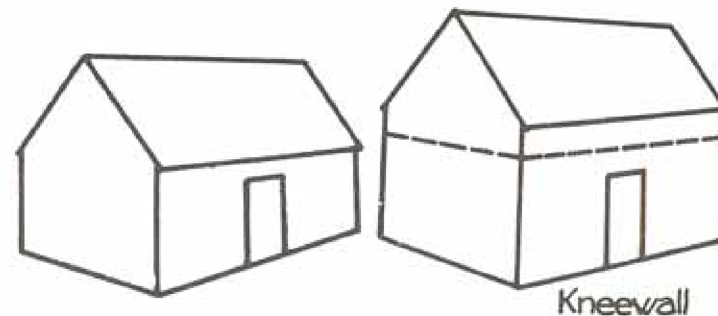
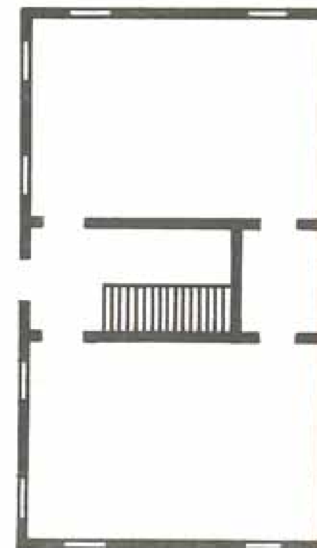


Fig. 61

The basic, narrow two-room plan for a typical worker's cottage was usually encased in an end-gabled house. The same floor plan, however, could be retained by converting to the front-gabled house type, with the entrance appearing at the side of the lot (Fig. 62, Fig. 63). This front-gabled variation was sometimes built two-deep on a single narrow strip of property.

Fig. 62 23 Smith Avenue



Center - entry plan,
Front - gabled cottage

Fig. 63

The kneewall-framed cottage proved a popular, durable house form. In West Newton it became the standard worker's dwelling of the 1850's and 1860's and lasted for several decades after the Civil War.

SIDE-ENTRY PLAN TYPES

A new building type, the front-gabled/side hall plan house, became popular in West Newton during the Greek Revival period. (See Figs. 20,28 and 44.) In this house form 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. 64). 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. Early side-entry cottages were usually built with the popular knee-wall method of interior framing. Although the side-entry plan predominated in many communities, the workingmen of West Newton apparently preferred the center entrance houses.

Many 2½ story side hall plan houses were erected in West Newton's workers' neighborhoods after the Civil War. They became especially popular during the 1880's and 1890's. Except for their 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 encouraged a 19th century institution, the boarder, who rented the extra rooms and often took meals with the family. This arrangement provided a source of extra income for the homeowner and a temporary residence for a newcomer, particularly a newly-arrived immigrant, to the village.

MULTI-FAMILY HOUSES

Before 1885, most workers' housing in this section of Newton was owned and occupied by single families. As the population increased and lots became more expensive, the double house made its appearance. A common feature of densely developed

Fig. 64 36 Adams Avenue

industrial communities like Nonantum, the double house appeared with much less frequency in West Newton.

The prevalence of housing designed for two families in the late 19th century did not necessarily introduce a corresponding decline in the number of homeowners, 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. Tenants in these houses were frequently families who were newly-established at the village.

Fig. 65 18-20 Auburndale Avenue

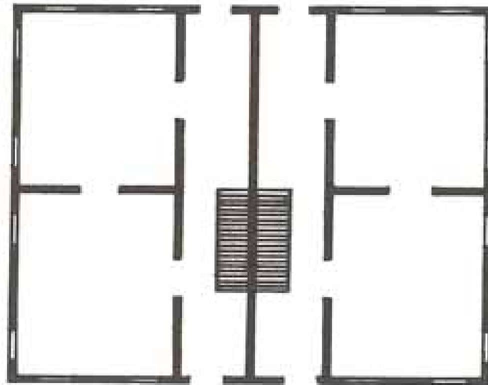


Fig. 66

Double houses were arranged symmetrically and designed to appear as a large version of the free-standing, single-family dwelling. The standard plan of the 1880's and 1890's in West Newton consisted of two adjacent side-hall houses, encased in an end-gabled house form (Fig. 65, Fig. 66). This house type, with its paired entrances, existed elsewhere in Newton before the Civil War and appeared even earlier in other Boston-area communities. Late 19th century examples, such as the house on River Street, were 2½ stories high, with the side walls expanded to incorporate two rooms. A variation on the standard plan that sometimes appears in West Newton is the placement of the front entrances near the corners rather than at the center of the house.

The rowhouse can be seen as a multiplication of the double house format, duplicating the side hall plan in three or more units. This basically urban form was rarely built in West Newton, although the rowhouse at 56-66 Webster Street is a very fine example.

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 along Waltham Street and in the neighborhood near the intersection of Cherry and River Streets.

On the exterior of these houses are paired, offset entrances in the front gable wall. The arrangement of the interior, however, is radically different from that of the double house. Instead of adjacent units, the apartments are stacked a-

bove one another (Fig. 67). 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 apartments, and usually a single entrance door (Fig. 67). Although the common flat-roofed, Boston style three-decker was built in West Newton near the turn of the century, the village has only a few examples. The name "triple decker" derives from the three porches, or decks, that appear at the back, and sometimes the front, of these houses.

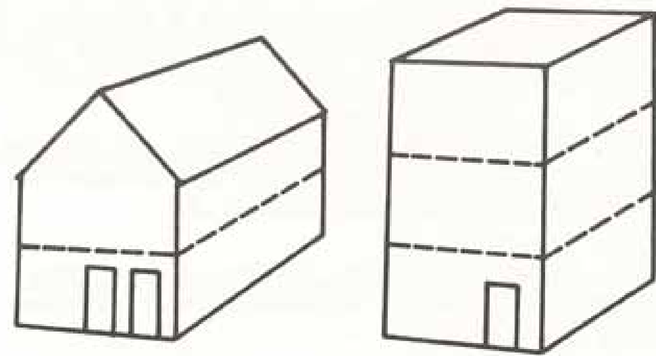


Fig. 67

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Credits

NEWTON'S 19TH CENTURY ARCHITECTURE: WEST NEWTON

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