

foursquare houses in form and were constructed in the 1880s, **281 Nevada Street** more closely resembles its original exterior. **275 Nevada Street** has been clad in a brick veneer, with a fanciful arch over the entryway and patterned brickwork along the exterior of the enclosed porch. These two houses provide yet another example of the way prevailing fashions are expressed in architecture.

**50** The house at **272 Nevada Street** predates many of its neighbors. Although the house was built in the 1860s, there are only a few physical hints of its age. The half-round window in the attic, the raking eaves of the gable end, and the slight returns at the cornice level suggest elements of the Italianate, a style popular in Newton by the end of the Civil War. The shed dormer along the southern roof slope is an addition made after 1976.

**51** Although the construction date of the house at **258 Nevada Street** is recorded as c. 1870s, much of the architectural detail suggests an earlier date. The symmetry of the five-bay façade, the T-plan house form, the pedimented gable ends and the fascia leading to a bracketed and molded cornice evoke the Greek Revival style fashionable in the mid-1800s. Numerous houses emulating this style can be seen throughout Newton, as it was fashionable by the early 1860s.

**52** The Joseph W. Jenks House at **238 Nevada Street**, also built in the 1860s, exemplifies yet another common house form. Although the house has seen been alterations altered in terms of the with brick veneer and a garage the addition of a garage, it is essentially an L-plan (also called aor bent) house) in form. The house serves as an introduction to the recent development accessed by a small road adjacent to the property. As such, it serves as an architectural prototype for the newly constructed units located behind it, resulting in a contemporary development that refers to vernacular building traditions of Nonantum's past.

**53** The Carr School at **225 Nevada Street** is fairly typical of the school

buildings erected in Newton in the first half of the twentieth century. Completed by 1936, the Georgian Revival structure exhibits symmetry in its fenestration, use of fluted pilasters and large, 20 over 20 window sash. The center pediment and detailed cupola atop the hipped roof give an academic air to the building. The Carr School is now actively used as the City's Cultural Center.

**54** The 1856 Celia Thaxter House at **524 California Street** was home to one of Newton's most famous poets of the Civil War Period. Renowned for her poetry about the seashore and woodlands, Mrs. Thaxter belonged to a literary circle that included Longfellow, Whittier, Hawthorne, Howells and James Russell Lowell. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Thaxter House has seen several additions and changes in style over the years. The scroll-saw wooden trim along the verandah, rafter ends projecting from the eaves, and the spherical turret arising behind the roofline are early examples of architectural features that would become widely popular during the Queen Anne period.

There is one other site in Nonantum that needs mentioning, although its distance from the main path of the tour may require driving.

**55** Nonantum's Irish immigrants founded a Catholic parish, St. Brendan's, at **285 Washington Street** in the 1850s. Our Lady Help of Christians replaced it in 1873. The church itself is a fine example of the Victorian Gothic style, exemplified by its pointed arch windows, pinnacles, and large tower. Also of note is the convent, rectory and high school that, together with the church, comprise the Our Lady Help of Christians National Register Historic District.

Text taken from *Discover Historic Nonantum*. Revised and updated by Newton Planning and Development Department in conjunction with the Newton Historical Commission, December 2005.

David B. Cohen, Mayor

## Discover Historic Nonantum

The village of Nonantum takes its name from an Indian word for rejoicing. It is one of several names ascribed to this small community along the Charles River. Others include "Tin Horn," deriving from the large horn used to call workers to the mills; , and North Village, a formal name in use until the late 1800s; and . Today Nonantum is often called Silver Lake, although today only a tiny fraction of the lake that once lay between Nevada Street and Adams Street remains.

In the 1600s, Nonantum was a broad plain sloping gently down towards the Charles River and . Its woodlands, meadows, and swamps belonged to the Park family, who also owned a large area of Newtonville. A few settlers arrived in the following century and by the early 1800s, there were small farms along Watertown Street, Crafts Street and California Street.

The names of these Yankee farmers survive in several local street names, including Faxon, Adams, Crafts and Allison. Even after the village's industrial boom, large sections outside of the village center remained essentially rural and as late as 1890, Crafts Street and California Street were picturesque country lanes known for their scenic beauty.

Industry came to Nonantum during the late 1700s with the Bemis Mills on the Charles River at Bridge Street. For the next 150 years, the village prospered as a center for the production of cotton, woolens and rope. New brick factories were erected on the shores of Silver Lake at Nevada Street and a large industrial development took over much of the area between Bridge Street and Chapel Street. The residential architecture of the village center reflects Nonantum's industrial underpinnings. Occupied largely by fac-

tory workers, rows of housing were clustered around the village center, their peaked roofs dominated by the tall smokestacks of the mills. Despite the textile industry boom, large sections outside of the village center remained essentially rural. As late as 1890, Crafts Street and California Street were picturesque country lanes known for their scenic beauty. Even the residential architecture of Nonantum reflects its industrial underpinnings. Occupied largely by factory workers, housing was clustered around the village center with the rows of peaked roofs dominated by the tall smokestacks of the mills.

The forces of industry, housing and business converged in a manner that influenced the building practices of Nonantum. For example, the relatively rapid industrial development created a need for factory workers. The modest dwellings rooted in a vernacular building tradition and constructed on small lots served as housing for a largely immigrant workforce and reflected the hierarchy in place on the factory floor. Company constructed two-family homes were rented to foremen and skilled workers, while unskilled workers and their families often rented single rooms in a house, or lived in boarding houses. The proximity of this housing to industry stemmed from the need for employees to be close to work, providing a sharp contrast to the suburban atmosphere found in many of Newton's neighborhoods. At one point, factories stretched the length of the block between Bridge Street and Chapel Street, and help to explain why Nonantum is still the most densely populated village in Newton today. Although the factories are gone, the structures remain, illustrating several successful examples of adaptive reuse and the changes that buildings endure over time.



Adams Street

Amidst this rather organic development pattern arose the cultural and civic institutions that bond a community together. The closely-knit neighborhood of small houses lining the streets, shops, religious structures and social clubs are the visible legacy of Nonantum's immigration patterns. The Italian population that now predominates this area inherited this legacy, adapting buildings that date as far back as the early 1800s for their own homes, cultural organizations and businesses. The particular sense of place and community defining the village's history is carried on to this day. Taken as a whole, Nonantum's architectural heritage is a progression from the agrarian to the modern, as changes in technology, transportation and immigration coincided to affect its development.

This walking tour covers a small section of Nonantum extending from the commercial district along Watertown Street to the Charles River, and includes several of the oldest and most important structures in the community's development. Traces of Nonantum's agricultural past can still be seen, albeit hidden amongst residential clusters and behind commercial façades. Gone are the open spaces characteristic of farming communities. In their place, however, exists a rich tapestry of residential, industrial and commercial landscapes, whose interplay has resulted in a dynamic, vibrant community. Except for the Nonantum Branch Library, none of the buildings on the tour are open to the public.

**1** The Nonantum Branch Library at **144 Bridge Street** occupies the site of a late 19th century building that served as both a police and fire station. Built in 1958, an arched vestibule is capped by a pediment with modillions. The pronounced granite entryway signifies the important civic functions occurring within. Across the street at Magni-Coletti Park stood Nonantum's first grade school, the Jackson School.

**2** The row of houses at the foot of Bridge Street represent common residential styles for dwellings built in Nonantum during the late 19th and early 20th century. One featured style is the mansard roof, seen on the house at **143 Bridge Street** constructed in 1921. Named after the French architect François Mansart, this roof form

is commonly associated with the Second Empire style popular between 1860 and 1880. In this example, the fish-scale slate tiles reflect roofing materials commonly used in the period.

**3** The house at **137 Bridge Street**, also built in 1921, is likewise topped with a mansard roof. The form is essentially a hipped roof placed atop another hipped roof of differing, often greater slope. As families' needs changed, additions and alterations were made to houses over time. Covered porches, projecting entryways, and the transformation of single family homes into two-family or multi-family dwellings were common. Many of these changes are readily visible in the houses on Bridge Street.

**4** In the second half of the nineteenth century, scattered houses surrounded by open fields characterized Nonantum's landscape. The village grew up quickly in the 1890s, and many double houses similar to that built in 1881 at **127-129 Bridge Street** were constructed. Built ca. 1881 and oriented with the gable-end set to the street, it gives the impression of being a single-family house. The entries centered on each gable side, however, attest to the back-to-back plan of the building. Although not unique to Nonantum, more double houses were built here than anywhere in Boston, serving as testimony to the rapid industrial development of the area and the need to provide housing for factory workers.

**5** Catherine McGuinness owned **125 Bridge Street**, a typical late 19th century single-family residence. Similar to its next door neighbor, this house has its gable-end facing the street. But unlike the adjacent double house, this residence is a true side-entry end house. Like many owners of these larger houses, Mrs. McGuinness rented her extra rooms to local factory workers. The large shed dormer protruding from the roof is a later addition to the 1881 house.

**6** Irish immigrants settled along Chandler Street in the 1860s, making it one of Nonantum's oldest residential sections. The houses at **3, 9** and

**32 Chandler** provide a nice variety of vernacular building styles employed by newcomers to the area. Although most cottages were relatively devoid of ornament, a few homeowners added fancy wooden trim representing prevailing styles to the doors and porches of their houses. The large brackets at the entrance to **3 Chandler Street**, constructed in 1915, are composed of wooden knobs, scrolls, button shapes and other designs glued together.

**7** One of the oldest buildings in Nonantum stands at **47 Bridge Street**. Dating from the early 1800s, this small farmhouse was owned by the Bemis family, early residents of Nonantum who were largely responsible for the area's development into a mill village and industrial center. (see #8 below) Although much altered and reoriented, the house retains some vestiges of its historical background. At one point the main entrance faced the Charles River, and the rear ell of the house most likely served as a kitchen wing for food preparation. Seth Bemis Jr. built a mansion, since demolished, several doors down at **19-21 Bridge Street**.

**8** The Bemis Mills at **1-3 Bridge Street** come into view as the street slopes down from the Bemis House toward from the Bemis House to the Charles River. Shortly after the Revolutionary War David Bemis built a bridge to Watertown, and by 1825 had constructed a small factory and dam adjacent to it. The first gaslights in America were in used at the Bemis factory in 1812. The family sold its Newton mill in 1847 to William Freeman, who and in 1860 Freeman acquired the Watertown buildings as well in the 1860s. Shortly afterward he sold the entire complex to Aetna Mills, a large woolen company who remained here well into the 20th century.

The Bemis family probably built the brick portion of the factory on the Nonantum side of the river. The roofline has been raised a full story and some of the windows have been changed, but on the whole the building remains a good example of the small riverside industries that sprang up throughout Massachusetts in the



Watertown Street

early 1800s. The oldest section (**8A**), located directly on the Charles River, is best viewed from the Watertown Bridge. Its scenic setting is typical of America's first factories.

Early mills such as the Bemis operation were always built along rivers, as water was the primary power source until about 1850. Held back by a dam, the water flowed into the basement level of the factory, where it turned large wheels connected by a system of gears and shafts to the machines upstairs. The mill pond-millpond behind the dam allowed provided a steady supply of water that kept the equipment in constant operation. The vestiges of this water power system can be seen at the Bemis site in the remains of a dam and the two arches at the base of the mill, which provided an exit for the water's outflow. In the adjacent section (**8B**) of the factory, machinery, supplies, and finished goods were carried through large granite openings at each story.

**9** Edwin O. Childs lived in this the modest 1910 Colonial Revival style house at **340 California Street**. Trained as a lawyer, Childs was one of Nonantum's best-known and most popular politicians. He served for 20 years as Newton's mayor, and was a leading advocate for a variety of youth programs. The Childs House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

Just beyond Chapel Street are three identical houses at **299-313 California Street**. Erected in 1880, they illustrate building types constructed to meet the housing demands of a community experiencing increased industrialization. The

Aetna Mills Company owned these two-family homes, renting them to the foremen and skilled workers employed in their factory. In contrast, unskilled workers and their families had fewer options, often renting single rooms or living in boarding houses. Thus, the hierarchy in place on the factory floor was commonly reflected in the housing options available to employees.

**11** Chapel Street received its name from the North Evangelical Church, located at **23 Chapel Street**. Department store clerk Samuel Lowry founded the church, persuading Thomas Dalby to donate land adjacent to his factory and enrolling the Eliot Congregational Church of Newton Corner to sponsor the project and provide financial support. Originally Congregational in denomination, the church is notable for its fine architectural design, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The present structure replaced a wood frame chapel that burned in 1872. It blends elements of the Gothic Revival, reflected in the arched windows and steeply pitched slate roof, with the Richardsonian Romanesque, signified by the robust brick courses and rusticated stone, quarried locally in Newton Center.

**12** The sprawling Chapel Bridge Park development covers most of the long block between California Street and Watertown Street. This complex, presently used for offices and light industry, remained the center of Nonantum's textile industry until after World War II. Englishman Thomas Dalby founded a stocking and hosiery mill here in the 1850s. Nonantum Worsted purchased the plant after the Civil War, converting it into a production facility for the wool yarn used in making worsted cloth. The company's operations were the most extensive in Nonantum, requiring hundreds of workers to run its steam-powered spinning machines.

Nonantum Worsted's main building stands at **55A Chapel Street (12A)**, a low-roofed, four-story brick factory that typifies the plain, functional mill construction of the 1880s. Next door, **57 Chapel Street (12B)** is the oldest building in the complex, erected for

Thomas Dalby's company during in the 1860s. Its side tower, buttresses, and now-removed mansard roof represent an earlier, more ambitious approach to factory design.

Crippled by a national economic depression, Nonantum Worsted went bankrupt in 1896. Saxony Worsted, another large textile firm, acquired the Chapel Street plant. In 1912, one of the major local events of the period occurred when Saxony employees went on strike, demanding higher wages.

The long, low brick buildings (**12C, 12D**) lining Chapel Street at the southern end of the complex housed machine shops. The window strips near the roofline, known as monitors, provide light for the large open manufacturing area inside. where Nonantum Worsted made spinning machines here. The plant was extensively rebuilt and enlarged to its present size. The New England's textile industry declined in the 1920s and by 1930, Saxony had shut down closed its Nonantum factory. Today, the complex serves as office space for a wide range of enterprises.

**13** James B. Murphy ran a general store from an old barn at **331 Watertown Street**. Although severely altered and clad in a brick veneer, the wood-frame structure is still identifiable by its four-bay, gable-front form, illustrating the type of commercial blocks that lined Watertown Street in the late 1800s.

**14** Built around 1905, the long, low block at **337-363 Watertown Street** introduced a new style of commercial architecture. It was then common at this time for community shopkeepers to keep have apartments above their stores, but this building provided space only for commercial tenants. The concept of combining a series of stores within a single block foreshadowed the modern shopping center. Despite renovations over time, the building's ornamented cornice along the side elevation remains a distinctive architectural feature, and the wooden canopy has sheltered several generations of Nonantum shoppers.

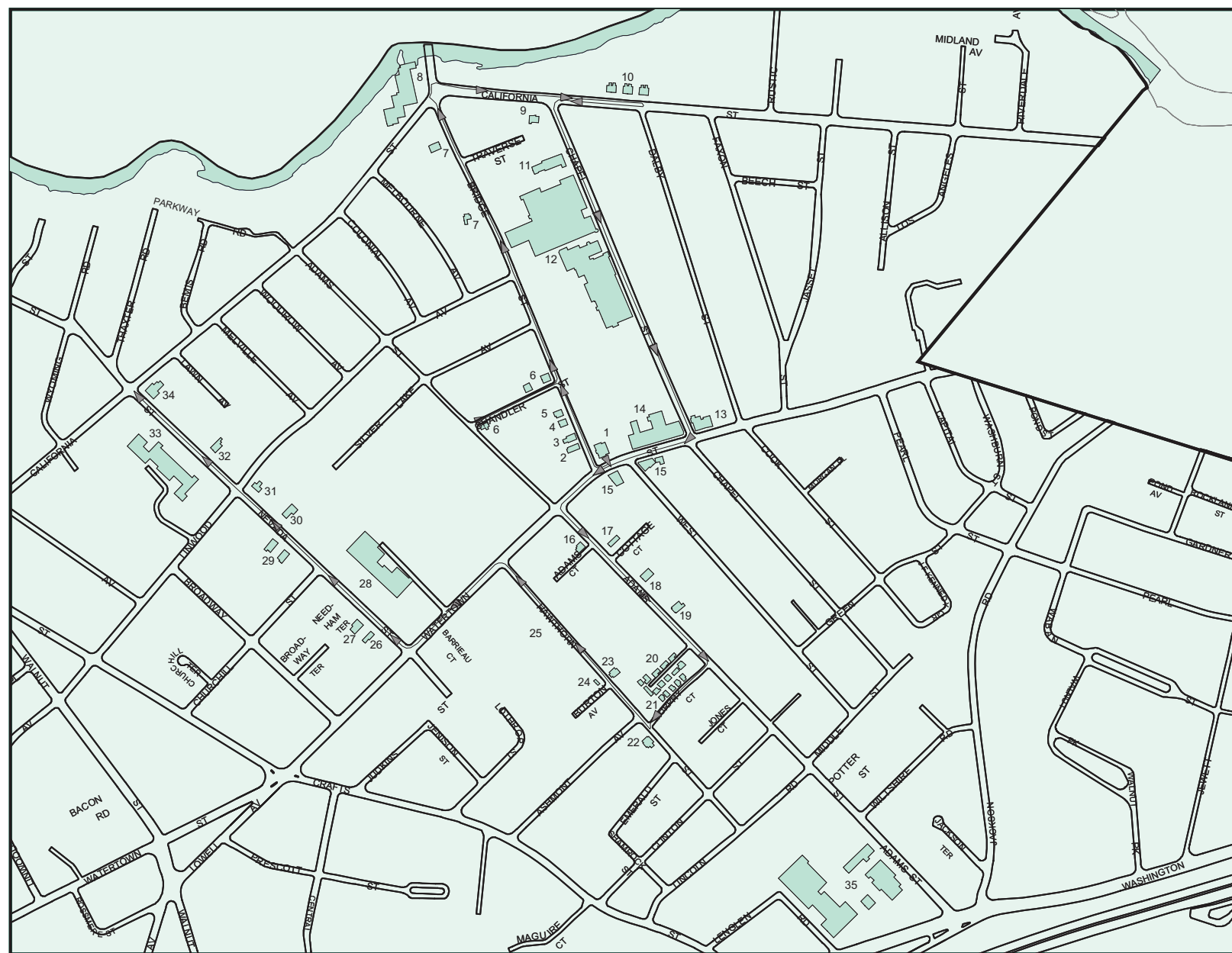
**15** Watertown Street developed into a significant commercial district in the 1870s, and by the turn of the century was a bustling thoroughfare crowded with trolley lines, horses and delivery wagons. While many of the buildings housing the community's period's druggists, tinsmiths, grocers, barbers, tailors, saloonkeepers and stables during this period remain, most are disguised by several layers of remodeling. The wood-frame corner building at **356-362 Watertown Street** retains its elaborate trim at the roofline of the first floor shop level, and the old American Legion post at **376-380 Watertown Street** still possesses its mansard roof, topped with a low-slung balustrade and displaying a classical pediment centered on the façade.

**16** The house at **143 Adams Street** is in many ways typical of Nonantum's early residential architecture. Built ca. 1870s, it is a simple two-bay structure with a gable roof designed for a single family. Later additions enlarged the house depth from one room to two, adding another door on the side elevation. Atypical for the area is the brick veneer present on the house. This treatment was sometimes added to give the structure a more imposing visage, as brick was considered to be more substantial than wood.

**17** The house at **152 Adams Street**, constructed in the 1880s, is a nice example of an end house, and is fairly common throughout the village. An end house derives its name due to the gable end of the roof being oriented to the street. This house exhibits modest Greek Revival characteristics with the wide fascia board along the gable end and the slight returns at the eaves.

**18** Temple Agudath Achim is located at **168 Adams Street**. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it provides a telling example of the importance assigned to a building's street façade. The cornice, decorative brick patterns, and stone quoins on the doorframe and corners embellish the façade, but do not extend to the structure's secondary elevations. While the side views demonstrate consistency in proportion and scale, the emphasis is clearly on the temple front. Built in 1912, this synagogue continues to serve Nonantum's Jewish population.

**19** The duplex at **184-186 Adams Street** was originally constructed as a single family home in the early 1890s. As the population of Nonantum grew, the need for housing increased. The structure was later divided down the middle, creating two adja-



cent units most likely very similar in plan. The rear additions were probably added when the house was subdivided into a duplex to enlarge each unit.

**20** In the early 1890s, Michael Quirk built several small developments along **Adams Street** and **Green Street**. One such enclave is found at **Quirk Court**, where the village's first Italian immigrants purchased many of the modest houses. The substantial alterations evident from the street speak to the way structures are altered over time to meet the needs of residents.

**21** Turn right on Murphy Court to come to a row of small houses along the right side of the street. Unlike Quirk Court, where the houses have witnessed much alteration over time, **9, 11, 13, 17 and 19 Murphy Court** exhibit an intact streetscape, relatively uniform in its presentation. The scene provides a sampling of vernacular architectural practices employed to meet the growing housing demand created by Nonantum's factory workers. While each house has its gable end oriented to the street, they are not truly end houses as the entryways are located just off the sidewalk, on axis with the roofline. Michael Quirk was said to have a hand in the development of Murphy Court, thereby dating it to the 1890s.

**22** Diagonally across the street from Murphy Court is a duplex at **81-83 Hawthorn Street**. This house, built in the late 1890s, is very similar to the duplex at 184-186



Pellegrini Park

Adams Street, with the exception that itbut is clad in a brick veneer. This exterior treatment speaks to the varying fashions and trends prevalent at different times. Another difference with this duplex is the way in which it wasthe residents chose to expand. Rather than increasing the depth of the house with a rear-extending ellad-dition, there exists a small, 1-? story wing attached to the left side.

**23** Walk down the street in the direction of Watertown Street to come to **56 Hawthorn Street**. Constructed by 1904, this is a well-preserved example of a four square house. Common characteristics of this house form include the hipped roof with hipped dormers; in this case present on the front and side roof slopes. Note the matching hipped porch supported by columns over the entryway, stylistically tying the house together.

**24** Across the street sits a small, three bay, single room deep house at **53 Hawthorn Street**. Although it has fallen into disrepair, it remains a fine testament to Nonantum's vernacular architecture. The mansard roof appears out of scale with the main block of the house, nearly equaling the first story in height. The mansard is not a surprise given the popularity of this roof form at the timewhen the house was constructed, between 1865-1875.

**25** The park along Hawthorn Street was at one time named for its location: Hawthorn Park. It was rededicated as **Pellegrini Park** in 1998, after Joanne C. Pellegrini, a lifelong Nonantum resident who was very active in civic affairs. Created in 1922 and expanded in 1931, the site sits on former landfill. The fieldhouse and recreation center was erected in 1950.

**26** Walking left on Watertown Street and right on Nevada Street leads to **323 Nevada Street**. This two-story house highlights an interesting derivative of the end house form.

Although only two rooms deep, the roof has a mid-point cross-gable as it extends to the rear. This uncommon feature is original to the house, which was completed by 1888.

**27** Next door, at **317 Nevada Street**, stands a very different house. Essentially a larger elaboration of the foursquare in form, certain additional features reference the Queen Anne stylisticallystyle. Built c. 1886, the projecting window bays asymmetrically placed on both the street and side façades are characteristic of this style, as are the expansive verandas on the first and second story.

**28** The Silver Lake Cordage Co. at **320 Nevada Street** was strategically located along the shores of Silver Lake. The lake has since been filled in, but the large mill complex remains a grand testament to Nonantum's industrial roots. Constructed in 1867, the Silver Lake Cordage Co.building is a Newton Landmark Preservation Site and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Sensitivity to architectural form is apparent by the symmetry and proportion of the façade and bays. The mansard roof over the corner turrets, projecting center tower and main block of the building defines its style. The brickwork framing the windows and along the cornice constitutes ornament much less common in later industrial buildings. The buttresses articulated on the façade of the Cordage Co. are similar to those found on the early buildings of at Dalby's Chapel Bridge Park; an unsurprising likeness, as both structures were erected around the same time.

**29** **281 and 275 Nevada Street** provide a telling contrast between two essentially identical houses. While both are