

Discover Historic WEST NEWTON

Nathaniel Allen, a nationally prominent educator, developed a progressive program that attracted students from all over the country and abroad. The Allen School was far ahead of its time. Racially integrated and co-educational, it had an experimental curriculum that emphasized field trips and learning by experience, as well as classroom work. One of the first kindergartens in the United States was established here in 1863. The non-profit Allen School and House Preservation Corporation now owns the property, generating income to preserve it through renting seven apartment units at the site. The Nathaniel Allen House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and was designated as a Newton Landmark Preservation Site in 1998 by the Newton Historical Commission.

In 1868, the house was moved to its present location on Cherry Street and converted to a three-family tenement. The oldest part, consisting of the doorway and two windows near the corner, was extended in about 1750 and again toward the end of the 18th century. The present long, gambrel-roofed building has much hand-carved decoration. The house has been restored and is now used for offices. The Dr. Samuel Warren House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and was designated as a Newton Landmark Preservation Site in 1998 by the Newton Historical Commission.

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David B. Cohen, Mayor



Until the early 1800s, the village of West Newton consisted of only a cluster of buildings along Washington Street and a few outlying farms. In 1720, only three houses were within a mile of West Newton Square. Agriculture was the chief occupation in the area and large sections of the village remained forested, with a region of swamps and marshland along the plains that extended to the Charles River and the Town of Waltham.

Nevertheless, this tiny settlement played an important role in the early history of Newton, becoming a religious center for Newton's northwestern section in 1764 when a second church, known as West Parish (Congregational), was built here. During disputes over the boundaries of the new parish, a line was drawn through a sizeable squash field, and West Newton's detractors from Newton Centre dubbed the village "Squash End." This rivalry continued into the 19th century. In 1848, though, West Newton succeeded in having the Town Hall relocated here from Newton Centre, where it remained until the early 1930s.

The village's growth was tied closely to its favorable location for transportation. Present day Washington Street, then called the Natick Road, connected Boston with Natick and the state's western communities and West Newton quickly became a popular way station. After 1834, it also became a station stop for the Boston & Worcester Railroad. The train, with its daily scheduled trips to Boston, soon brought suburban commuters to West Newton. Although its full impact would not be felt until after the Civil War, by 1850, a relatively large number of new, year-round homes were under construction. While long time residents remained near the village center, wealthy Boston commuters preferred West Newton Hill. At the same time, an influx of Irish immigrants and local workmen were building small cottages along the flats

towards River Street, Auburndale Avenue, and to the north near the Waltham border. West Newton had little industry and supported only a small business center for local services, shopping, and highway traffic. Its attraction for city dwellers was the rural ambience, small town sociability, cheap land, and its close proximity to downtown Boston. With the new population and greater prosperity, churches were established, and several small wood-frame buildings in the center of the district were replaced with handsome business blocks. The village also became well known for its superior private schools, particularly the West Newton English and Classical School, founded by Nathaniel T. Allen.

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West Newton Square ca. 1920

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The typical suburban dwelling in West Newton was wooden and occupied a generous lot planted with ornamental trees and gardens. The first commuters to settle here built simple, rectangular houses in the Greek Revival and Italianate fashion, architectural styles that usually avoided ostentatious display. Long front porches and projecting bay windows, however, were characteristic of these new suburban residences.

Exaggerated roof forms, towers, and turrets, as well as all manner of intricate wooden trim, became an accepted part of house design in the village after the Civil War. Even the more modest homes of the Second Empire and Queen Anne styles displayed some element of this fashion for decorative detail.

This walking tour of West Newton's village center covers the commercial district and nearby residential neighborhoods. Several phases of the community's development, from the scattered farms of the 1700s to the multi-family housing of the early 20th century, are represented. None of the sites on the tour are open to the public.

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For approximately 80 years, **Captain John Ryan Park**, located at the corner of Washington and Cherry Streets next to the City's Police Headquarters building, was the site of Newton's Town Hall. A large wooden building with Victorian trim, it was the result of the gradual addition to the



Old City Hall (now Ryan Park) ca. 1888

original Second (West) Parish Meetinghouse constructed in 1764. West Newton became the seat of local government in the mid 1800s after a long dispute with Newton Centre that included a plan to split West Newton off and form a separate town. A state fact-finding committee, called in at the height of the argument, eventually recommended a site at the geographic center of Newton, near Bullough's Pond, and a new City Hall was constructed there in 1932. The former Town Hall was demolished shortly after the move.

Across the street at **1326 Washington Street** is the **Unitarian Church**, with its Gothic stone tower dominating this section of the business district. The First Unitarian Society was organized in Newton in 1848, when Unitarianism was a relatively new denomination. The congregation drew many of its members from the village's Boston-oriented population, who came here in increasing numbers during the 1840s and

1850s. Until this building was completed in 1905, church activities were held in several West Newton locations, including the Davis Tavern, the Village Hall, and a building at the current site of the West Newton Cinema. Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, a nationally prominent architectural firm that specialized in

churches, designed the current building and the attached parish house.

Washington Street has always been West Newton's major thoroughfare. Taverns and hotels were built to serve Boston-bound stagecoach and wagon traffic in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Seth Davis constructed the brick hotel at the intersection of **Washington and Watertown Streets** in 1831, a venture that at the time represented a substantial investment in the village center. When the rail line from Boston was put in three years later, the hotel acquired the patronage of train passengers as well, and as a result, the name Railroad or Terminal Hotel. Today, the building stands as the only remnant of West Newton's early downtown.

West Newton Square became a shopping district as the village prospered after the Civil War. Only the Robinson block at **989-1001 Watertown Street** remains among the large commercial build-

ings erected here during the Victorian era. A vestige of its ornate trim appears on the side wall at the right, and in the elaborate brickwork and incised flower patterns cut in the stone over the windows.

At one time, all of Eden Avenue was part of the Seth Davis estate. Davis, a celebrated teacher, author, politician and lecturer, became such an important figure in Newton life that thousands of the City's residents attended his 100th birthday party in 1887. He came to Newton in 1802, reputedly with 15 cents in his pocket, and built a modest fortune from several shrewd real estate investments. Davis, however, was known primarily for the private school he founded in West Newton and for his abilities as a teacher. Davis Street, Davis Court and Davis Avenue are named after him.

Seth Davis planted thousands of trees in West Newton, some of which are said to shelter the street that leads to his home at **32 Eden Avenue**. The Davis residence, built about the same time as the Railroad Hotel, is a handsome brick structure with brownstone trim. It appears today much as it did in the early 1800s, although the original grounds of the estate have been subdivided into small building lots. Bricks, built out in projecting rows, decorate the front of the house and its corners, and graceful columns appear at the façade and main entry on the side.

The Davis property on the west side of Eden Avenue was opened for development during the 1870s. Directly across from the Davis residence at **29 Eden Avenue** is an Italianate house built in the late 1870s. This building, with its central peaked gable, occupies the

first lot of the development to be sold. **7** Next door, at **23 Eden Avenue**, is another house built as part of the development in the 1880s. Its front porch illustrates the fondness for elaborate wooden detail that was prevalent among late 19th century homeowners.

The houses at **3 and 15 Davis Avenue** are nearly identical and date from the 1850s. **9** Both are examples of the Italianate style. Small scrolled brackets, a popular motif in this period, appear at the windows, doors, and rooflines of these buildings. The only major difference between the two houses is the use of corner blocks at **3 Davis Avenue**.

The pace of construction quickened after the Civil War. Much of the village was built up by the close of the century, with the exception of Waltham Street, which remained largely rural until the end of the 1800s. Several of the large estates along Waltham Street were broken up for smaller house lots, some relatively recently, although the street's gentle curves and tree-lined roadway remain from its early days.

In the 19th century, Waltham Street was a winding country lane lined with farms and country estates. The large, tree-shaded lawn at **432 Waltham Street** recalls this era. William Whitwell, supervisor of the Boston water project at Cochituate, a major engineering feat of its day, lived here during the 1840s.

Andrew Potter moved to West Newton in 1856, erecting his house at **404 Waltham Street** in the same year. Like many West Newton residents, Potter commuted to his Boston real estate office from the train station at the village

center. The first section of the Potter residence, at the left, ended where the doorway is presently located. Later additions were skillfully blended into the original by using nearly identical windows, clapboards, and wooden moldings.

Harvard Medical School, came to West Newton in 1872. Dr. Thayer selected one of the village's most prominent sites for his residence at 473 Waltham Street, which was built about 1886. The building's soaring tower and the repeated arches of its front porch are particularly well-suited for this important intersection at Waltham and River Streets.

12 The house at 390 Waltham Street dates from around 1846. The Greek Revival style was the height of fashion in West Newton at that time. The triangular pediment at the sides of the house, wide boards that trim the roof and corners, and the columned porch were common details in this architectural period.

The two-part mansard roof, with a flattened top and four-sided lower section, is a hallmark of the style. This small cottage at 20 River Street, built about 1870, is also from this period. A shelf with large, curving brackets protects the entryway.

16 The Second Empire, or Mansard, style, which became fashionable at the time of major growth in the village, was popular in West Newton between 1860 and 1880. The two-part mansard roof, with a flattened top and four-sided lower section, is a hallmark of the style. This small cottage at 20 River Street, built about 1870, is also from this period. A shelf with large, curving brackets protects the entryway.

17 Italianate bracketing and rounded windows appear in this mansard-roofed residence at 25 River Street, along with a steep, peaked wall dormer on the front façade which is characteristic of Gothic Revival design. 18 Many Mansard style houses at the village center were the work of Warren Davis, a carpenter-builder who lived at 37 River Street.

19 The Warren Davis property, once extending to Henshaw Street, was broken up into smaller house lots around 1910, when two triple-deckers were built at the corner of

River Street and Henshaw Street. Although triple-deckers were a popular Boston house form, relatively few of these three-family apartment buildings were constructed in Newton. The name "triple-decker" is taken from the stacked porches, or decks, that can be seen at the front and rear of these buildings.

20 The Queen Anne style best expressed the love for intricate detail seen in the Victorian period (1840-1905). The small house at 64 River Street, built about 1890, is typical. Rows of decorative wooden shingles appear on the upper stories. The same trim can be found in much larger Queen Anne style residences.

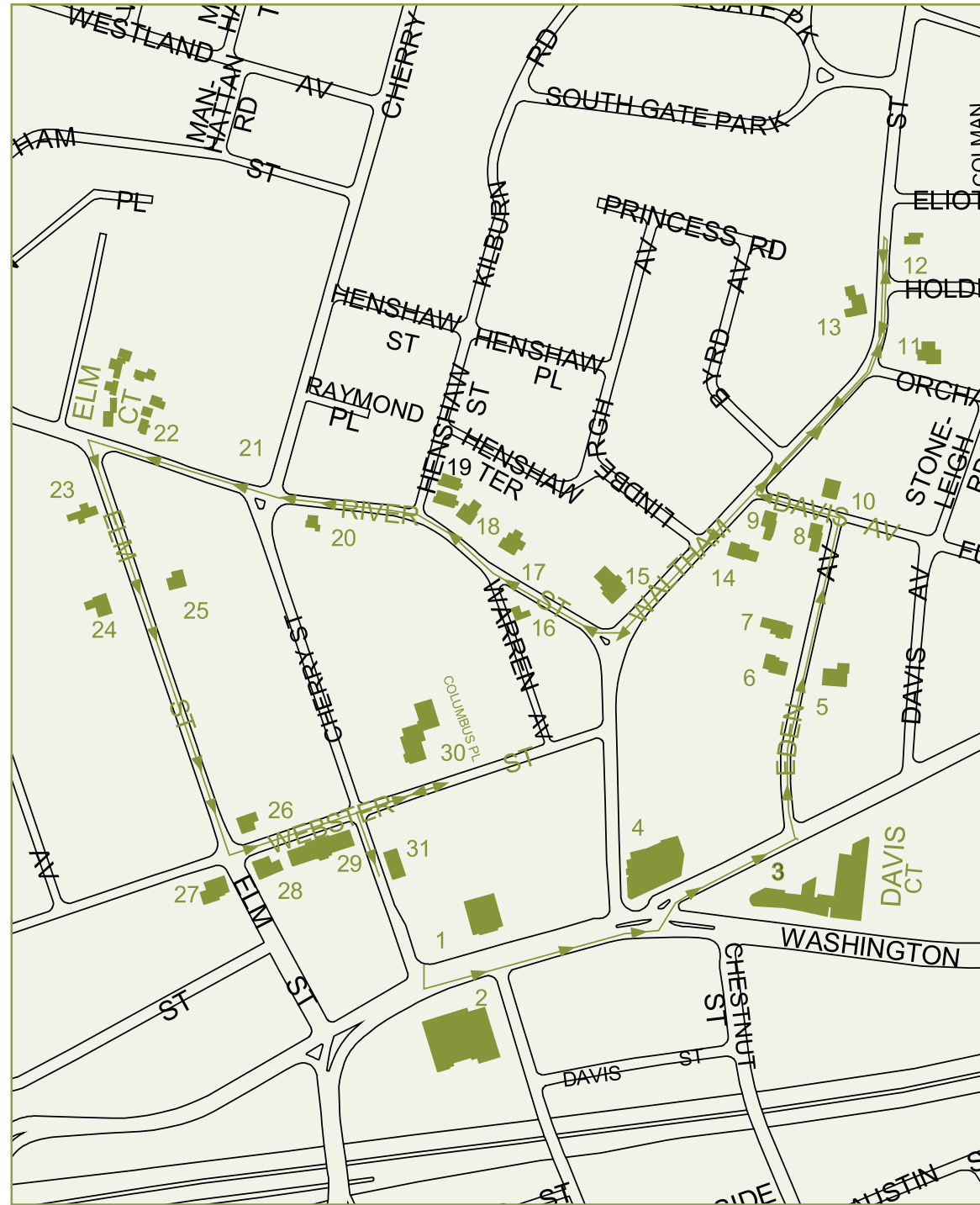
21 The West Parish Burying Ground is one of three early cemeteries in Newton. It dates from 1781 and was originally affiliated with the Second (West Parish) Meeting House established here in 1764. The names of West Newton's early settlers, such as the Houghton, Fuller, Jenison, and Adams families, frequently appear on the grave markers. Grey slate stones with round tops, closely spaced in short rows, were erected here until about 1840. Later stones are white marble and often take a pointed, Gothic shape.

River Street became a center for the community's Irish population just prior to the Civil War. The Irish came to the port of Boston beginning in the 1830s to escape a series of devastating famines in their native country and gradually moved out to the surrounding towns. Some of West Newton's early Irish settlers became small farmers, although most found work as carpenters, stone masons, wagon drivers or coachmen at the larger estates. After the horse-drawn streetcar line was built in 1868 along River Street to Waltham, they began to look for work in the Waltham factories.

22 Elm Court, built up in the 1880s, was one of several small side streets lined with the residences of Irish homeowners. Thomas Galvin, a stone mason who became the first resident of Elm Court, moved here around 1882. In the last decade of the 19th century, increasing numbers of Italian immigrants moved to West Newton, buying houses that had been built by the Irish.

23 Elm Street, a wide, tree-lined boulevard in the mid-19th century, was built up between the 1840s and 1880s. The small cottage at 13 Elm Street was once surrounded by a large lot owned by Edward Bond, an insurance agent who worked in Boston. The stucco-surfaced walls and porch are 20th century changes. Small panes of glass at the doorway and the heavy cornice moldings at the roof, however, indicate that this house was constructed during the mid-1800s.

24 The houses at 31 and 32 Elm Street date from the 1870s. Orna-



ted wooden trim still characterizes 32 Elm Street. Machine-sawn ornaments, usually purchased by the piece, decorate the roof area and porch. 31 Elm Street has been altered during the 20th century, but it was once the home of James Nickerson, who came to Newton in 1874. Nickerson opened a tailor shop in the village center and built a large commercial block at Washington and Cherry Streets (now demolished). During his 30-year residence in West Newton, Nickerson also founded two banks and was active in local government.

26 At the corner of Elm and Webster Streets are three houses whose blocky, rectangular shapes, the porches and simple detailing are testimo-

ny to the community's modest yet comfortable lifestyle in this era. These houses were probably first painted a gleaming white, as were many of the village's buildings in the mid-1800s. The front of 80 Elm Street is dominated by a deep triangular pediment with simple brackets. 27 The pediment form also appears at 89 Elm Street, a Greek Revival style house that has a characteristic columned porch. 28 Similar in shape, but trimmed with Italianate bracketing and arches on its porch is 90 Elm Street, dating from the 1840s.

29 Rowhouses, an essentially urban house form, appeared infrequently in Boston's suburbs. The attached houses at 55-66 Webster Street are a particularly handsome adaptation of this building type. In contrast with the brick fronts of Beacon Hill or Back Bay, the building's six units have been designed as one long house, broken at the center by twin roof peaks. Wood shingles give the block a comfortable, informal effect that blends with the wood-frame buildings of surrounding residential streets.

For a brief period, West Newton became a center for Boston intellectuals who summered here, bought or rented some of the older houses in the village, or came to stay with friends. Within a ten-year span during the 1840s and early 1850s, West Newton was the home of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote *The Blithedale Romance* here; Horace Mann and Elizabeth Peabody, nationally prominent educators; and Lydia Maria Child, noted author and leader of the anti-slavery movement. The reputation of West Newton's private schools, along with its rural setting and accessibility to Boston, attracted other, lesser-known figures in the fields of education, literature, politics, and philosophy throughout the 1800s.

30 Built in 1841, the Nathaniel Allen House at 35 Webster Street is West Newton's most important historic landmark. A Greek Revival style residence with an impressive columned front, the house was bought in 1854 by Nathaniel Allen, who founded the West Newton English and Classical School, often called the Allen School, in the same year.



The Allen House at 35 Webster Street



399 Waltham Street

13 The small, picturesque house at 399 Waltham Street fronts directly on the road. It dates back to about 1735 and is said to be one of Newton's oldest remaining residences. The home was built for Dr. Samuel Wheat, who purchased part of a large local farm owned by Jonathan Park. The steep, barn-like gambrel roof and narrow window openings indicate the building's age.

14 Italianate style brackets and small windowpanes suggest that 454 Waltham Street is another of West Newton's mid-19th century houses. It was owned by William Bosworth, who was employed by the Chickering Piano Company in the South End of Boston.

15 Frederick Thayer, a graduate of