

a block away on Washington Street, and built by William Williams, a cousin of the founder of Williams College. Another very early house built in 1735 was the home of Dr. Samuel Wheat at 399 Waltham Street.

The growth of the village continued with the arrival of Congregationalists, and the establishment of the Second Church in Newton in 1764, which split off from the first Congregational church in Newton Centre. An old nickname for West Newton, "Squash End", arose from the rivalry of that period between Newton Centre and West Newton. Soon thereafter the West Parish Burying Ground was established at the corner of Cherry and River Streets. Here, graves of some of the early settlers of the village are found. In 1781, the Second (or West) Parish was officially incorporated.

A hub for transportation and commerce

Washington Street was from the early days a major east-west road, linking the Charles River basin with the town of Natick to the west. The railroad was constructed alongside it. West Newton became a terminus stop on the Boston and Albany line in 1834. Horse-drawn coaches connected West Newton to Waltham to the north and Newton Lower Falls to the south. The availability of transport spurred development of the area as a commuter suburb.

One of the oldest buildings in the district is the Railroad Hotel, also known as the Davis Tavern, built in 1831 by entrepreneur, educator and civic leader Seth Davis, and now serving as a retail and office space. Originally rail tickets were sold here, making it one of the oldest train stations still standing in the country. The Railroad Hotel, at 1279 Washington Street, was designated a Newton City Landmark in 2019.

On April 7, 1834, the directors of the Boston and Worcester Railroad and 50 guests gathered at the Davis Tavern to celebrate their first train journey coming west from Boston. From that time, the train brought suburban commuters to West Newton and over the next several decades housing lots were developed both north and south of the railroad tracks to accommodate these families.

Seth Davis (1787-1890) had arrived in Newton in 1802, built his house nearby at 32 Eden Avenue, founded a school housing Newton's first lending library, and planted thousands of trees throughout the neighborhood. Photographs remain of the widely-attended celebration of his 100th birthday. Several nearby streets are named after him.

The only remaining large commercial building from the 19th century in West Newton village is the Robinson Block, at 989-1001 Washington Street. Dating to 1875, this substantial brick building features balanced massing and detailed ornamentation with elaborate brick work and incised floral patterns over the windows. Look towards the roofline on the south-facing façade for the "1875" date. Originally it housed an apothecary and provided housing for immigrant workers. It has had many uses since then, including a general store, and it now houses a pharmacy on the street level.

A nexus for education reform

West Newton became a center for educational reform in the mid-19th century, attracting ideas, talent and new families to move here. [Horace Mann](#) (1796-1859) was an educational reformer who lived on

West Newton Hill, on Chestnut Street. He became the first Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education and the impact of his ideas was felt nationwide. Mann was a champion of the Normal School, or teacher training college, and brought it from Lexington to an expanded site in West Newton. He invited Reverend Cyrus Peirce (1790-1860) to lead what is thought to be the first college for women in the United States.

Nathaniel Topliff Allen (1823-1903) was recruited by Horace Mann to head the West Newton English and Classical School, located on the corner of Washington and Highland Streets, where the teachers in training could practice their new methods. The approach used to pedagogy was far ahead of its time, emphasizing experiential learning, and welcoming all races in co-educational classrooms.

Allen became a well-known abolitionist. His opponents called Allen and his neighbors “the radicals and incendiaries of West Newton.” Allen befriended and housed a former enslaved man, Arthur Crumpler, who faced negative publicity in the Boston newspapers in 1863 when he cast his first vote. Crumpler married a student at the school named [Rebecca Davis Lee](#) who became the first African-American woman physician in the United States. Another graduate of the Allen School, [Elizabeth Piper Ensley](#), became a teacher and an activist for African-American and suffrage rights. She and her husband, also a teacher, moved from Massachusetts to Colorado.

The [Nathaniel T. Allen homestead](#) at 35 Webster Street dates to 1841. The house was expanded and opened by his daughters as a school, where they continued a progressive approach to education. This building, a structure in the Greek Revival style with an impressive columned front, thought to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad and is a Newton City Landmark. The Newton Cultural Alliance has converted the barn into a community theater space.

[Elizabeth Palmer Peabody](#) (1804-1894), who is credited with her strong advocacy for kindergartens, moved around the northeast giving lectures and lived at 34 Temple Street on West Newton Hill in 1850-51. She promoted the process of learning through play, drawing on German pedagogy for young children, which was not widespread in the United States at that time. She was also a Transcendentalist and a publisher.

Elizabeth’s sister, Mary Peabody, was the wife of Horace Mann; the Mann family had their home at 155 Chestnut Street. (That house was demolished but the carriage house remains at Crocker Circle.) They occasionally hosted Mary’s sister, Sophia, and her husband, Nathaniel Hawthorne who is said to have written *The Blithedale Romance* at their home in 1851. Horace Mann became a US Congressman in 1848, appointed to fill the seat after the death of John Quincy Adams.

Reverend Henry Lambert, living at 128 Chestnut Street from 1854-1900, was also a strong voice for abolition along with his daughter Mary T. Lambert and son-in-law William Francis Allen. The [Lambert House](#) is a Newton City Landmark and is associated with the fountain at the corner of Chestnut and Highland Streets, created in 1903 by sculptor Anne Whitney in memory of Catherine Porter Lambert.

The Lamberts had many guests at their house, including Ralph Waldo Emerson. These individuals and other West Newton residents met frequently in a reading and discussion society called the Athenaeum.

The seat of Newton’s civic life for 80 years

From 1848 to 1931, West Newton served as the civic center for Newton. The town offices were set up in the former Congregational Church building, located on the corner of Cherry Street and Washington Street, on the site of what is now Captain John Ryan Park. This building had been bought by the town and then remodeled and expanded when Newton became a city in the 1870s. Then in 1930, construction began on the current City Hall, on Commonwealth Avenue, which since then has continued to be the seat of city government.

West Newton remains the location of the city's police headquarters and a local district courthouse. Both are housed in Classical Revival buildings built in 1931 on Washington Street and designed by the architect James Ritchie. Both buildings are decorated with pairs of carved stone eagles holding a garland. This symbolizes that prosperity comes from justice.

Houses of worship anchored the community

Houses of worship were an important component of the community as West Newton developed. As congregations grew, they needed larger meeting places. In the early 20th century, two churches were built in gothic revival style. The [First Unitarian Universalist Society in Newton](#), located at 1326 Washington Street, was designed by the prominent architectural firm of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson and built in 1905. Prior to the completion of this building, the Unitarians had met in several other buildings in West Newton, including the Railroad Hotel.

The congregational church, the [Second Church of Newton](#), was originally located on Washington Street. In 1916 construction was completed of a significant Gothic Revival sanctuary with stained glass windows and a tall ornamented spire at 60 Highland Street, just south of the village center. The spire is a visible landmark for travelers, whether by car, rail or on foot.

To the west of the village center, [St. Bernard's Church and Rectory](#) at 1515-29 Washington Street is a Newton City Landmark. The [Myrtle Baptist Church](#) at 21 Curve Street has been a center for the African-American community in Newton since the 1870s.

Black history and West Newton

In the 1870s, African-American Newton residents established a neighborhood in the area of Curve Street. This historic neighborhood came to be known as "the Village," within the village of West Newton. Some residents found employment nearby at the Boston & Albany depot, with its associated lumberyards and warehouses.

Initially, many of these African-American families worshipped together with progressive white Newtonians and abolitionists at the church now known as Lincoln Baptist. In 1874, those families moved to form their own church, establishing Myrtle Baptist Church. The first church, built in 1875, was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1898. The thriving community, offering jobs and the promise of property ownership, attracted other African-American families to the Village from Boston and farther away.

In the early 1960s, the chosen route for the Boston extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike bisected the Myrtle Baptist neighborhood, destroying homes and businesses and displacing families. Some continued to worship at Myrtle Baptist despite moving out of Newton, and the devastation of the

neighborhood catalyzed residents, some descended from the original entrepreneurs, workers, and property owners, to form the Newton Fair Housing Committee in the 1960s.

Other notable architecture in West Newton

The original West Newton Branch Library at 25 Chestnut Street is a Tudor Revival structure built in 1926 with funds raised by community subscription. Over the front door carved in the stone lintel are the words "Memorial Library". The building has now been re-purposed as an annex to the city police headquarters on Washington Street.

The former Peirce School, built in 1896, is visible at the rise of Chestnut Street and notable with its terracotta/brick massing, symmetry and impressive collection of chimneys. When originally built, it provided classrooms for the booming population of children as more and more families moved to West Newton Hill. In the 1970s, as Newton's school population dipped, it was converted for use as senior housing.

As West Newton grew as a commercial, transport and intellectual center in the late 19th century, residential areas continued to develop both to the north and south of the village center, providing a veritable walking textbook of architectural styles by decade, from mansard roofs to turrets. Homes from the early 19th century can still be found along Cherry and Webster Streets and on adjacent streets. Over 200 houses featuring an unusual level of integrity of the original residential architecture from the mid-19th century through to early 20th century are found on [West Newton Hill](#), clustered in two National Register historic districts: the Putnam Street Historic District and the West Newton Hill Historic District. Many of these houses have Historic Newton House Markers.

Sources for learning more about the history of West Newton

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