

Lindsay Cavanagh, co-author of Gardens of the New Republic: Fashioning the Landscapes of High Street Newburyport, Massachusetts (2004), graciously contributes this brief history of High Street and its architecture:

Noted historian Samuel Eliot Morrison lauded Newburyport's architecture in his Maritime History of Massachusetts. He wrote, "Federalist architecture has here left perhaps her finest permanent trace. High Street, winding along a ridge commanding the Merrimac, rivals Chestnut Street of Salem..." High Street in Newburyport extends from High Road, Newbury, on the border of that town, and runs north to the Three Corners that meet approximately two miles further in the northern end of Newburyport.

This street being proposed for inclusion in the Newburyport Local Historic District runs parallel and to the southwest of the Merrimack River. Newburyport's early settlement developed close to the active waterfront while the open land west of the downtown and bordering on High Street retained its rural character until about 1800 when a surge of new construction on the ridge rose above the town. Many houses built along High Street at this time are outstanding examples of Federal homes. It is unusual to find so many still standing, still forming a community in the same manner that they originally did over two hundred years ago.

The houses and public spaces that border High Street reflect the history of Newburyport and speak for its recognition and preservation. Architect William Graves Perry, known for his work on the Rockefeller Foundation restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia, and a Newburyport resident during his childhood, writes: "They form a line or community or group of houses over two miles in length possessing a composite air of dignified complaisance. They resemble their cousins on the side streets, houses that are built closer to the street and to each other, but they bespeak emancipation from congestion and an effort to bring into city life the amenities that are dependent on seclusion."

Yankee money, ingenuity and hard work combined to build the Federal houses that are predominantly found on the southern three fourths of the street. The original High Street homeowners built their houses mainly between 1778 and 1818, during the peak years of

New England's maritime culture. They were simple frame constructions with clapboard siding; built as a box they were two or more rooms deep. Attached wings augmented the basic shape, while fanlights, the second story Palladian window and accented front door were the main decorations. The facades had a single flat plane and focused on the center entry. Typically, above the window were keystone lintels balancing the sills below. Architectural plans for the uncomplicated but handsome houses are presumed to be designs drawn by the local ship's carpenters that were ubiquitous in this shipbuilding town – the same men who created the graceful brigs and schooners that sailed from Newburyport's harbor. The elegance and dignity of their construction reflect the amazing success and vision of the merchants and sea captain owners who invested in the profitable European and West Indian trade. These men established a financial base for the town that was essential to its long-term economic growth. The houses they built have that same feeling of timelessness and permanence.

High Street, however, is not purely a reflection of the American Federal era or Newburyport's early maritime success. The northern portion of High Street includes more varied styles, interesting in their own right: vernacular bungalows, Queen Annes, various Colonial and Greek Revivals as well as genuinely old as well as new Federal style homes.

The economic disruption of Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807, Newburyport's 1811 disastrous waterfront fire, the War of 1812 and the silting in of the harbor contributed to end significant new construction by 1820. By mid-century the extension of the old Eastern Railroad to Newburyport, the growth of steam-powered textile mills, comb, cordage and hosiery factories, leather factories and tanneries and a sizeable fishing fleet began a new cycle of affluence in the city. The new residential architecture was predominantly in the Greek Revival style with later fashions switching to the emerging Victorian and Classical Revival styles. As the post-World War II boom began occasional bungalows joined their more massive neighbors on High street as the occasional large land holdings were broken into smaller lots.

High Street's Public Spaces

Newburyport's two public High Street parks stem from different eras but both fulfill the main precepts of early American parks – public access, retention of space according to the principles of landscape design, and preservation of the spirit of rural tranquility.

Bartlet Mall

The first Newburyport parcel of land to be designated as common land surrounds a kettle hole known today as the Frog Pond. It lies at the head of Green Street, close to the city's center. Named for owner Edmund Bartlet who purchased the land in 1805 for \$5000, the land was originally used for grazing animals but has had a myriad of uses over the centuries. In 1799 townspeople created a promenade bordered by trees paralleling the High Street side of the park. In 1805 a courthouse designed by Bullfinch was built between the allee and the pond. It was remodeled in 1853 and in the 1970s a section was blown up by the members of the Weatherman, in an act of social protest. In the latter years of the 19th century the Bartlet Mall Improvement Society chose landscape architect Charles Eliot to submit a plan to improve the design of the property. Although there was not enough money to complete his plan *in toto*, his improvements were considered successful. They included construction of several flights of stairs leading down the embankment to the Frog Pond, a gravel beach bordering the pond, and additional plantings and paths to further connect the property. The Mall's allee bordering High Street has recently been planted with American Elms, and the landscape has been renovated. Today, the Mall is mainly used for civic events, a peaceful resting place or for jogging. In winter, skaters enjoy the pond and the city children slide down its hills.

Atkinson Common

Land for Atkinson Common was donated to the city in 1873; an active neighborhood group, the Belleville Improvement Society, has since augmented its size. In 1894 the Society began the process of overseeing the design of trees, shrubs, beds, drives and walks in the picturesque and elaborate manner of the day, gradually transforming the open fields into an elegant Victorian park punctuated by a gazebo, a rusticated stone

tower built by the Works Projects Administration, a bronze statue of a Civil War soldier and a lily pond. The Society continues to advocate for the Common. In 2000 the park was renovated and reworked but its historic character has been carefully preserved. Its evocative monuments to the Civil War combine with the dignity of mature trees to provide a unique and peaceful landscape.