

## Acknowledgements 2007 -2015

### Historical Society of Watertown

Pamela B. Hubley (2007), Audrey Jones Childs, Joyce Kelly,  
Karl H. Neugebauer, and Marilynne K. Roach  
[www.historicalsocietyofwatertownma.org](http://www.historicalsocietyofwatertownma.org)

### Watertown Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee

[www.watertown-ma.gov](http://www.watertown-ma.gov)

### Watertown Community Foundation

[www.watertownfoundation.org](http://www.watertownfoundation.org)

### Watertown Free Public Library

Photo credits from website, on page 3(left), page 11  
and page 15 postcard.  
[www.watertownlib.org](http://www.watertownlib.org)

### Watertown Police Department

Chief Edward P. Deveau  
Officer Grady - Police Details  
Officer Tom Dicker - Bicycle Safety Officer

Photographs on pages 3(right), 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14,  
and top six photos on page 15 taken by  
Karl H. Neugebauer

### Watertown Town Seal on the Front Cover

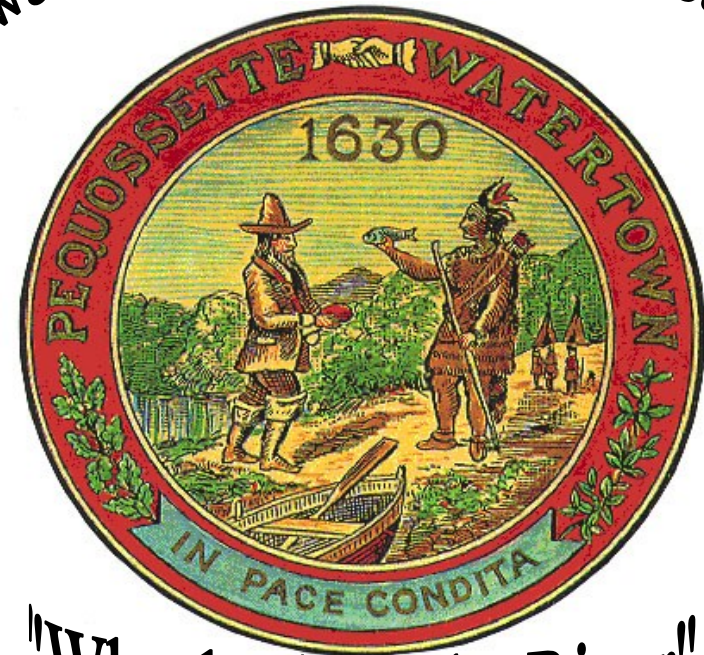
designed by Charles Brigham and Jesse Fewkes

*Centerfold map designed by Fred, Karl and Google Maps*

### Brochure designed by

*Karl Huntington Neugebauer*

## Watertown Historic Bicycle Tour



## "Wheels along the River"

-Past, Present & Future-

<a six mile, self-guided bicycle tour>

Funded by a grant from the  
Watertown Community Foundation

**"A river runs through it"**

April 13, 2015

## Welcome

The Historical Society of Watertown and the Watertown Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee are pleased to present this tour of historic Watertown by bicycle. The ride focuses on sites around the Charles River, the key element of Watertown's history, but includes other points of interest along the way. Please bike responsibly and enjoy the ride!

### Watertown Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee is a Town committee chartered to promote non-motorized transportation. We believe communities that actively encourage citizens to bike and to walk are cleaner, healthier, more business-friendly, and generally more livable than communities that neglect transportation alternatives.

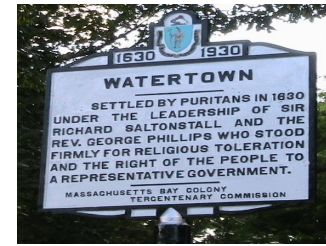
### Historical Society of Watertown

The goals of the Society are education, preservation, and restoration, with the Edmund Fowle House as headquarters for its functions and activities.



Watertown Square

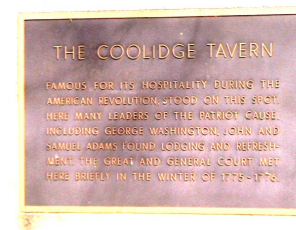
## Related Photographs of Historic Watertown



Sign in Watertown Square



Administration Building



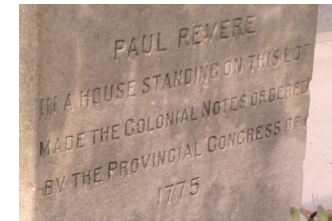
Coolidge Tavern Plaque



Paul Revere Marker



MBTA Barn Galen Street



20 Watertown Street



Galen Street Bridge Postcard

## #10 Saltonstall Park

Main St. Park was re-named Saltonstall Park in 1897 to honor Watertown founder Sir Richard Saltonstall. The Watertown Free Public Library and the Grant School already occupied opposite corners of the area.

By the 1930's, after much wrangling and an act of legislature, the town also built its new Administration Building (aka Town Hall) designed by R. Clipston Sturgis to replace the smaller first Town Hall at Main and Church Sts. This required the relocation of the Soldiers' Monument. The original town hall, a Greek Revival structure, was located where the Armenian Library and Museum stands today.

The Watertown Boys Club (later re-named The Watertown Boys & Girls Club) opened in 1971 on the former site of the Grant School. A private organization, it leases the land from the town for a nominal sum, but finances its sports, child-care, classes, etc. through the generosity of local businesses and citizens, not by taxes.

A few houses that occupied the space were demolished or moved, including the Thaxter house (now at the corner of Main and Cuba Sts.), once home of poet Celia Thaxter. A plan to dam the stream that ran along the park's north border for a skating pond never happened and the stream now runs under ground.



Northeast View



Armed Services Flagpoles



Veteran Memorials



Southwest View

## #1 The Edmund Fowle House

The Edmund Fowle House, built in 1772, is the second oldest surviving house in Watertown. During the British occupation of Boston in the Revolution, Watertown was the seat of Massachusetts government. Committees of the 2nd and 3rd Provincial Congress met in this house from April 22 to July 19, 1775, and the Executive Council of the Provincial Congress met here from July 19, 1775 to November, 1776. Well known visitors to the house from this period include John Adams, Paul Revere, John Hancock, and Sam Adams.

In 1776 the Treaty of Watertown was signed in this house, the first treaty signed between the newly formed United States of America and a foreign power (the St. John's and Mi'kmaq Tribes of Canada), the result of General Washington's desire to secure our northern borders from the British. At this time, the Executive Council was meeting in the Fowle House. The 28 member Executive Council acted in place of the Governor and Lt. Governor until the adoption of the Constitution in 1780.

In 2004 and 2006 the Historical Society received grants from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the restoration of the house. The inside has been restored to the 1775 period and the outside has been restored to the 1872 period. For more information visit [www.Historicalsocietyofwatertownma.org](http://www.Historicalsocietyofwatertownma.org).



Photographed in 1922  
(WFPL photo)



and today in 2015  
(KHN photo)

## #2 Common Street Cemetery

Many of the earliest Puritan settlers of Massachusetts' towns emigrated as members of pre-existing English congregations with their own ministers. Their Meeting Houses – a town's one publicly supported building besides a school – served for civic gatherings as well as religious services.

In England at that time, all loyal English subjects were considered members of the state-supported Church of England. The Puritans wanted to avoid that but the idea of taxes supporting local churches carried over to New England and lasted until growing (Protestant) diversity separated town and church in 1835.

In Puritan times, every Watertown resident was required to not only belong to a parish, but also support that parish through the payment of taxes. In 1775, this spot became the fifth location for the First Parish of Watertown, which is now located on Church Street in Watertown Square.

The original corners of the Watertown Meeting House, which was the last meeting house built by the town, are marked by four granite posts. In 1775 the Provincial Congress met here at the outbreak of the Revolution, while the Massachusetts legislature convened here during 1775-1776 when Watertown was the capital of Massachusetts.



One of the four granite posts (post pictured is located in the North West corner)



Brigham and Noone Families



Moses Warren Jr.

## #9 Joseph Thompson Footbridge

The Charles River originates at Echo Lake in Hopkinton, flows 80 miles through 23 communities and meets the sea at Boston Harbor. The water is naturally brown from the wetlands it flows through, not from pollution. Water quality actually steadily improves thanks to the work of dedicated groups like the Charles River Watershed Association.

Twenty species of fish live in the Charles including the Alewife and Blueback Herring which migrate upriver each spring from the ocean to spawn. Native Americans caught them for food and to fertilize their crops, perhaps using a weir (trap) in the river.

Watertown's early settlers certainly operated a fish weir below the falls for generations. Now fish ladders on the River's lower five dams help the fish migrate although they still have to avoid sea gulls, great blue and black-crowned night-herons, and local fishermen. One ladder is here by the falls (which also marks the Charles' original tidal reach). In 1634 100,000 shad and alewives were caught in just two tides. Now the MDC has to prohibit the taking of these fish because their numbers are so low.

Stone walls on the north bank mark part of the old mill race which powered the grist, paper, and other mills until the 1920's.



Dedication Plaque



View east to the Falls



Photographed from the middle of footbridge towards Pleasant Street

### #8 Bemis and Aetna Mills

Around the turn of the 18th century, Seth Bemis invented a crude device which was used by women in their homes to prepare cotton for carding, which was used for a time instead of Eli Whitney's cotton gin. Bemis was the owner of the Bemis Mills, which manufactured combed cotton into a fine cotton thread. It is thought that the first duck or sailcloth manufactured in America was woven at the Bemis Mills using a twisting machine crafted by a Bemis workman after importation of sailcloth was cut off by England.

After the War of 1812, its sails being tattered and needing replacement, the Bemis Mills used the Bemis Warp manufacturing method to weave new linen sails for the USS Constitution. In 1812, the Bemis Mill was the first place in America where gaslights were used with gas extracted from coal. A short time after the Revolutionary War, a bridge was built across the Charles River by Seth Bemis, which is now Bridge Street.

In 1860 Seth Bemis sold the mills to William Freeman, who then sold them to Aetna Mills, a large woolen company which ran a successful operation at the mills manufacturing fine woolen material for women's clothing. The jobs at Aetna in the 1910s paid well and in 1919 there were 350 employees working 200 looms. Aetna Mills rented two family houses near the factory to foremen and skilled workers. The group of workers' houses on both sides of the river near the mill was known as 'Tin Horn', after the horn that summoned the workers to work at 7:00 AM in the winter and 5:00 AM in the summer. Generally the work day ended at 7:30 PM, except on Saturday when work ended at dusk. Eventually business soured, and in 1929, the company moved its operations to Fitchburg.



Bemis Mills



Aetna Mills

### #3 Old Railroad Crossing at School and Walnut Streets

From this vantage point we can see the path of the railroad that ran through Watertown. The Waltham and Watertown Branch Railroad dates to 1849. It connected to the Fitchburg Railroad in West Cambridge, near what is now the Fresh Pond Shopping Center. The track runs along Fresh Pond, crosses under Mt. Auburn Street near the Watertown-Cambridge line, and then crosses Grove Street and Arlington Street before reaching this point. From here, the track continued west through Watertown Square and into Waltham.

The railroad was very important in Watertown's industrial past. It served the stockyards that were along Walnut Street, and it served Hood Rubber, which had a very large factory in East Watertown in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through the end of World War II, the railroad carried freight to and from the Arsenal. In its day, the railroad was also a means by which Watertown received some of its basic necessities, such as coal, lumber and bricks. There was also passenger service. The Boston & Maine ran passenger cars until 1925.

The railroad tracks are in extremely poor condition, resulting in frequent derailments. The segment between Grove Street and School Street is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and there is a detailed plan to develop it into a multi-use recreational and commuting path.

Ultimately, the Town of Watertown and Department of Conservation (DCR) would like to connect the Minuteman Path, which terminates at Alewife Station, to the Charles River using the old Watertown Branch as the route.



#### #4 Commander's Mansion, Talcott Avenue

In 1816 Captain George Talcott selected this location for the Watertown Arsenal because it was inland, but still accessible by ship since the Charles River had not yet been dammed. In 1964 when it was closed as a U.S. Army Arsenal, the Watertown Arsenal was believed to be the second oldest arsenal in the United States. The initial site consisted of 20 acres of land, which was expanded over time to include 130 acres and employ about 10,000 people at its peak. The original quadrangle of 13 brick buildings was designed by Alexander Parris, who also designed Quincy Market and the Parker House in Boston.

The Commander's Mansion was built in 1865 by Major Thomas J. Rodman for \$65,000 (over \$700,000 today), an enormous amount of money for that time. Major Rodman was taken to task by the U.S. government for his extravagant spending of taxpayer's money and transferred to Rock Island, Illinois, never to spend one night in his new home. With 27 rooms, 11 marble fireplaces, and 13 foot high ceilings, the house is sited on 7 acres of land. The house interior has elaborate bas reliefs, plaster trim moldings and ceiling medallions, as well as floors of mahogany, birch, butternut, black walnut, cedar and oak. In 1908, the grounds were landscaped by Fredrick Law Olmsted's firm, who also designed Boston's Emerald Necklace and New York's Central Park.

The Mansion was occupied by various Commanders succeeding Rodman until the 1980's. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in January of 1976. It is currently available to be rented for events. More information may be found at the web site



The Commander's Mansion also known as the Rodman House

#### #7 Watertown Landing

In pre-colonial times, Native Americans raised corn on the fertile lands which were to become Watertown. Because the once-tidal river could be forded at this point, several roads from Boston, Cambridge and points west converged here. The roads follow the routes of ancient Native American foot paths, later enlarged to accommodate wagons and herds of cattle, using the abundant fish for both food and agricultural fertilizer. In addition to farming and fishing, cattle raising was also at the center of early colonial life.

The colonists built a fish weir nearby and constructed roads for driving cattle. The first water powered mill in Watertown was used by area farmers to grind their corn, wheat and rye. The road to Cambridge, now known as Mount Auburn Street, was called Mill Street during this time. Once the grist mill moved from a site near the falls to what is now the Delta this crossroads grew to be the commercial center of Watertown. The mill race and factory canals connected with Treadaway Brook and its tributaries here where they joined the Charles near the Town Wharf.

Originally, the section of Galen Street now reserved by the MBTA for buses was the only road to the bridge. The present configuration of Watertown Square dates largely from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Metropolitan District Commission extended Mount Auburn Street across the brook to the new bridge and demolished the ancient mill, rows of retail buildings, and an iron foundry. The MDC transferred ownership of the Delta that took their place to Watertown in 1927 on condition that no structure other than a flagpole be built on it.



Memorial Day Celebration-1927



The Watertown Elk

## #6 Founders' Monument, Charles River Road

Sir Richard Saltonstall was one of the investors of the Massachusetts Bay Company, one of several business corporations that backed colonial settlement in hopes of profiting from the importation of the new lands' natural resources. This company, unlike others, managed to obtain permission to bring their company charter with them so that their governor (chairman of the board) and general court (board) could meet and make decisions in New England. Otherwise, the colony would have been ruled by a board of directors meeting only in London, England. This was the first time that such transfer of power was allowed, and is regarded as key influence on the development of the colonies into an independent nation.

In 1630 the widowed Sir Richard sailed with six of his children on the *Arbella* with other Puritans and landed in what is now Charlestown. Although he stayed less than a year, he was a key organizer of the group that settled Watertown. Sir Richard returned to England in March of 1631, after being fined several times for minor offenses. He was believed by some to be too independent to comply with the strict rules of the Watertown parish. (Saltonstall descendants who settled in North Shore towns served Massachusetts throughout four centuries.)

George Frederick Robinson (known as G. Fred) raised thirty thousand dollars for the creation of the Founders' Monument commissioned from Henry Hudson Kitson (sculptor of the Lexington Minuteman) for the town's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1930. A bronze of Sir Richard Saltonstall, holding the Massachusetts Bay Charter, stands above bas reliefs of "Clapp's Landing" and Reverend Phillips of the First Parish Church leading the first tax protest.

G. Fred was the Historical Society President from 1930 to 1949.



Sir Richard Saltonstall Statue



Bas relief - biscuit for bass

## #5 Roger Clap Landing Site

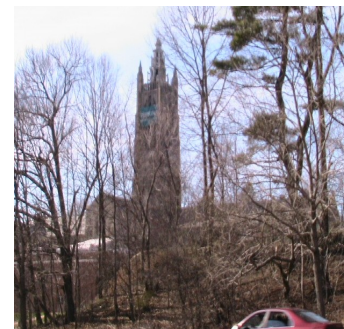
The *Mary & John* was one of the first of about a dozen shiploads of immigrants that arrived in Massachusetts Bay the summer of 1630. Left by the captain "in a forlorn place" at Nantasket Point in June, the company sent a party of "ten men well armed" – including twenty-one year old Roger Clap – under the command of Captain Richard Southcot to find a place to settle.

Years later, Clap wrote how the men "went up the Charles River, until the river grew narrow and shallow, and there we landed our goods with much labor and toil, the bank being steep." That evening they learned that "three hundred Indians" were camped nearby. "In the morning, some of the Indians came and stood at a distance off, looking at us, but came not near us. But when they had been a while in view, some of them came and held out a great bass towards us; so we sent a man with a biscuit, and changed the cake for the bass. Afterwards, they supplied us with bass, exchanging a bass for a biscuit cake, and were very friendly unto us."

These Englishmen and the others from the *Mary & John* soon settled Dorchester, but Watertown architect Charles Brigham depicted the friendly encounter on his design for Watertown's town seal. The Perkins School for the Blind across the street from the stone marker is located at the site that Clapp referred to as the steep bank.



Roger Clap Marker



Perkins School Tower

# Watertown Historic Bicycle Tour 2015

