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MetroWest Medical Center

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Town of Natick Sidewalk Tour Guide

Continued:

- **Natick Post Office.** Built in 1936 on the site of the original Wilson School. The main lobby features a mural of John Eliot ministering to the Indians as they were about to depart for Deer Island. The mural was done by Henry Hollis Holbrook as a WPA project in 1937.

General notes: By the end of the 19th century, Natick had 23 shoe factories, making it the third largest manufacturer of shoes in the country. By 1919, however, overall demand for shoes, as well as changing styles and cheaper labor elsewhere, resulted in the town having just 12 factories open; by 1929, that number had dwindled to two. The last shoe factory, the Winchell on Washington Avenue, closed in 1972.

Basic Distance .5 miles

Rating Accessible (i.e. wheelchairs, handicapped)

Start & End Points Start on the Natick Common facing North. Ends back at Natick Common.

Conditions / Traffic along RT27

Mostly sidewalks. Heavy traffic.

Facilities Public restrooms available in Morse Library and Town Hall. Pay phones at several locations.

Safety Tips Use the crosswalks and obey traffic lights.

Parking If there is no parking available; find a legal parking spot elsewhere and walk to the start.

NOTE

All public parks areas in Natick are drug and alcohol free. Please don't litter.

* Available in alternative formats upon request.

For more information contact
natickwalks@mail.com

(s0) Historic Downtown Natick

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- From Natick Common, face North to see the **First Congregational Church**. Built in 1875 to replace the structure lost in the downtown fire of 1874. The 2,351-pound bell in the tower was donated by Leonard Morse; the clock by Nathaniel Clark. The church sits on property that was originally part of a 100-acre ministerial lot given by the Natick Indians.
- Cross RT135 to the east side of RT27 and head North. The first building on the right is **Woodbury's Block**, currently the home of Middlesex Savings Bank. This commercial lot started out in the mid-19th century with three floors, then had the third floor demolished. The third floor has since been rebuilt.
- On the left side of Main St. is **Clark's Block**. Built in 1874 by Nathaniel Clark to replace the building lost during the fire that took place in January of that year. Formerly housed town offices and a hall that was used for everything from lectures to concerts to Town Meeting. Considered a fine example of High Victorian Italianate architecture.
- Next on the right is **Rice's Block**. Built in 1874-75, it currently houses Fair and Yeager Insurance, which was established in 1899.
- After that is the **Masonic Block**. Built in 1874, it is a fine example of High Victorian Gothic. It houses several offices and local chapter of the Masons and Rebekahs.
- Across on the left side of the street is the **Walcott Building** (also known as the Debsan Building). Built in 1888 on the site of a former shoe factory destroyed during the fire of 1874. With distinctive Romanesque style, this bldg. is considered the handsomest in town.
- Just up Summer Street is the **old historic Firehouse**. Built in 1875 to house the main unit of the Natick Fire Department, it was sold to The Center for Arts in Natick in 2000, three years after the fire department moved to its current location on Route 135. The building is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places.
- Next on the right side is **Winch Block**. Built in 1875, it currently houses the local branch of Citizens Bank. In its early days, it housed the town's post office.
- On the left side is **Hogan's Block** built in 1876 and Natick Federal Savings Bank. Built on the site of the former Hoey's Pharmacy.

Content by

Maureen Sullivan & Natick Historical Society

- Cross South Ave to see the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge**, rebuilt and dedicated in 1994 and cross over the Walker Pedestrian Bridge. At one time, this was an all-vehicle bridge that connected Walnut Street to Route 27. It was rebuilt as a pedestrian bridge in the 1990s and dedicated to Richard Walker, a local mail carrier.
- At one time, the railroad tracks were street level. In the 1890s, it was decided to depress the tracks, which changed the face of downtown; did not have to worry about trains disrupting traffic. Natick also gained a handsome depot built by **H.H. Richardson**, the architect who built the Wellesley Town Hall and Trinity Church in Copley Square. Unfortunately, most of the depot has been demolished, although some of the turnstiles and other pieces of the former depot may still be found the lower floors of the current building.
- On the north side of North Ave, on the left side of Walnut St. is the **H.P. Harwood and Sons Baseball Factory**. Built in 1858 as the world's first baseball factory, it supplied baseballs and softballs to leagues around the country until 1976, when the operations were moved to Georgia. Today, the building has offices and apartments.
- On the right side of Walnut is the **Natick Outdoor Store**, which occupies the former site of the Natick Co-Op supermarket, which was in business from 1947-77. Before the Co-op, the site housed a shoe factory.
- To the right is the **Natick Albanian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation**. Established in 1919 for the town's large Albanian population, it maintains an active congregation to this day.
- Go right over **Trooper George Hanna Memorial Bridge**. Dedicated to a Natick resident who died in the line of duty in 1983.
- To the left is "**Auto Alley**," South Avenue. This portion of South Avenue has always been commercial. In the old days, it was the site for depots and factories. At one time, it included a car dealership and antiques store. It now houses several auto-related businesses from the corner of Washington Street to Casey's Diner. The other side of South Avenue (the side closer to the library) has been a mix of commercial and residential; the lot behind the police and fire station once held a warehouse and several residences.
- Across South Ave on the left is **Wood Block**, originally built to house the **Natick Theatre** and several commercial enterprises. This was also home to **Kemp's Bowlaway**, a popular neighborhood spot for nearly 50 years. The wooden storefront at the corner of

Washington St and South Ave is the last one of its kind in downtown Natick.

- The next building is **Childs Block**. This building once housed a skating rink. It was named after a 49er.
- After that on the left is the **Morse Institute Library**. The original building was erected in December 1873, according to the intentions written in the will of Mary Ann Morse. The library has had several renovations over the years, the most recent being completed in 1997. The original building is on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, the library has about 250,000 volumes and about 375,000 circulation, making this one of the busiest libraries in the area.
- Next to the library is the **Police Station/Fire Station**. Built in 1997 on the site of the former **Colonial Theater**, the stations were designed as a "continuation" of the design of the library.
- Across RT135 is **Town Hall**. Built in 1998, it houses the majority of town offices. It was built on the site of the former police station, and is adjacent to the site of the former town hall, which is now a parking lot. The parking lot was also the site of the town's first Catholic church, which is how Church Street got its name.
- **Natick Common** was Laid out in 1856, it includes the town's oldest war memorial (the Civil War monument, dedicated in 1867), the Spanish-American War memorial/flagpole and the gazebo, originally built in 1967 and rebuilt in the early 1990s.
- To the west of Natick Common is the **Walcott Block**. Originally built in the 1850s by Edward Walcott, this was a three-story building. The top two floors were removed in the early 1980s. The first high school classes were held here. Today Natick Center Graphics & other.
- To the left across Pond St. is the **Odd Fellows Building**. Built in 1888 for the Takawambait chapter of the IOOF, it currently has a bakery and offices; the top floors, house a fencing club, are undergoing renovation.
- **First Baptist Church**. This structure was built on the site of the old church, which was demolished in 1979. The old church was one of the few buildings that survived the Fire of 1874; the First Congregational Church held services here while its church was being rebuilt.