Wilmington's Centre Village Historic District

Walking Tour

Presented by: The Wilmington Historical Commission

for the Town of Wilmington's Residents and Visitors

Welcome to Wilmington's Centre Village Historic District. Your Walking Tour begins here at the Hearse Barn and Scaleskeeper 's Office and will continue west on Middlesex Avenue towards and beyond the Town Common for approximately one-half mile, then across the street to Church Street, returning east on Middlesex Avenue to the Wildwood Cemetery across the street from the Scaleskeeper's Office. The Wilmington Historical Commission hopes you enjoy this scenic and historic stroll.

THE AREA PRESENTLY KNOWN AS the Town of Wilmington was originally settled in 1635 as part of Charlestown Village. In 1730, the General Court incorporated parts of the territories of Woburn and Reading into Wilmington. In 1737, an additional 600 acres from Billerica were secured to compose the present landmass. The Centre Village Historic District, at that time, contained several houses and the Town's meeting house. Principally an agricultural community throughout the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, the 110-acre area along Middlesex Avenue and Church Street was thinly settled. The population as a whole grew very slowly during the late 1700s, and the District developed largely as a settlement scattered along what is now Middlesex Avenue.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST meetinghouse in 1730 gave Wilmington a center for religious and civic events. Aside from the designation of the Old Burying Ground in 1733, construction within the District included only a few homes during the 1700s, namely, the Squire William Blanchard House, the Nichols Homestead and the Captain Joseph Bond, Sr. House, all on Middlesex Avenue. In 1793, construction on the Middlesex Canal was begun in North Billerica, continued through Wilmington along present day Shawsheen Avenue and Main Street, and finally completed in Boston. Historically significant for several reasons, the Canal is on the National Register of Historic Places and, in 1967, was designated the third in a series of National Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks.

BETWEEN 1800 AND 1865, the Town as a whole grew from 797 inhabitants to a mere 850. Many of the principal roads of modern day Wilmington were constructed during this time, including Salem Street, Chestnut Street and Church Street. A large part of the population growth was also due, in part, to the establishment of bake houses by the Bond family in the early 1800s. The owner of the Bond Cracker Baking Factory, Captain Joseph Bond, Sr., established his business in 1802 on Middlesex Avenue, where it lasted until a fire destroyed it and the first meetinghouse in 1864. In addition to his own home, Captain Bond built cottages for his family members and more important employees, evidenced by those homes still in existence along Middlesex Avenue. In 1840, the Old Centre Schoolhouse was built to accommodate the residents of the District who pleaded for decades at Town Meeting to have a schoolhouse built closer to them than the other four school houses scattered across the Town. Shortly after 1824, when church and state separated, the Free Will Baptist Society was established as Wilmington's second religious institution. Its church was built in 1841 with a tower centered on the gable, two entries, and a triangular light in the pediment. The building has housed Town Hall (1865-1983), where it was updated to its present condition, then the Wilmington Arts Center (1984-2020), and presently holds school administrative offices. The present Congregational Church was rebuilt in 1865. Between 1875 and 1899, the Town Common was established with land generously bequeathed to the Town by Sabra Jaques Carter, purchased from Otis Buck, a butcher. Several Victorian style houses were subsequently

constructed along Church Street. The first high school, the Centre School, was built in 1888, adjacent to the Old Centre Schoolhouse. In 1914 it became the Centre Grammar School and remained as such until it was demolished in the early 1980s. The second high school, the Swain School. was built in 1914. and the Buzzell School in 1935. A small number of later 20th century houses have been constructed on vacant land in the District.

THE CENTRE VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT was listed as a site on the *National Register of Historic Places* in 1992. It possesses a concentration of well-preserved buildings, schools and grounds spanning the architectural styles of the l8th, 19th, and 20th centuries. These include, but are positively not limited to, the Bond homes, the Warren Eames Cottage, the Hudson-Roman House, the Town's first burial ground. the animal pound, and a concentration of schools spanning the 19th and 20th centuries.

TODAY, THE CENTRE VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT remains an attractive location for residents and visitors. The homes and grounds are well-maintained and serve to remind us of a timeless history and heritage. The Town Common hosts a variety of activities. Perhaps most notable is the Fourth of July Celebration that spans one full week and includes carnival rides and games, children's activities, parades, entertainment, a petting zoo and food kiosks representing the Town's various organizations and clubs. The festivities are capped off by a renowned fireworks display. The Centre Village Historic District's recognition as a national landmark today is supported by the Town's pride and respect for the preservation of its history and heritage.

Centre Village Historic District Insert



Centre Village Historic District Legend

V1	Hearse Barn, c.1890
V2	Scalekeeper's Office. 1840
V3	Olde Burying Ground, 1731
V4	First Congregational Church. 1865
VS	Sq. William Blanchard. Jr. House, 1724
V6	Animal Pound. 1814
MS	Rogers Park
V7	Bond-Blaisdell House. 1833
V8	Joseph McMahon House, c.1930
V9	Bond-Skilton-McMahon House. 1815-1850
S1	Old Centre Schoolhouse, c.1839
S2	Swain School, 1914
S3	Buzzell School. 1935
V10	George Eames Cottage, c.1854-1856
V11	Thomas D. Bond House. 1856
Vl2	Otis Buck-Adams House.1850
V13	Town Common. 1875-1899
M18	Veterans Monument
Vl4	Hudson-Roman House, 1897
M16	Vietnam Veterans Memorial
V15	Nichols Homestead. 1760
V16	Captain Joseph Bond, Sr. House. 1795
VI7	Warren Eames Cottage. 1850
V18	Wilmington Arts Center. 1842
M4	Robert W. Parent Memorial
Vl9	Wildwood Cemetery, c.1795
M3	Veteran Graves, Simpson Lot, Old Soldiers Lot

VI Hearse Barn, Middlesex Avenue, 1890.

V2 Scaleskeeper's Office, pre-1840, Middlesex Avenue. Sq. William Blanchard, Jr. may have built this building in relation to his position as state inspector of hops, or merely as his workshop. It originally stood on Blanchard's land next to the Animal Pound on Glen Road, as did the Town's hay scale, and served as the office for the Scaleskeeper. The Town of Wilmington's Public Buildings Department was instrumental in its preservation, coordinating with the Historical Commission, and executing the move from Glen Road to its present location. The Olde Burying Ground was established in 1731 and is the burial home for Prior to this establishment, the deceased were buried in Woburn, Billerica or on family property.

V3 Olde Burying Ground, Middlesex Avenue, 1733. Enclosed by a low stone wall and containing numerous arched slate stones with common motifs of death's heads and urns, the Burial Ground was established in 1733 for the purpose of securing "a decent burying place to bury the dead in the town." Prior to this, the dead were buried in Woburn and Reading or near the homes of the deceased. The first person buried here was William Pearson, a child of nine years and nine months, and son of Keandol Pearson who led the committee that established a burying ground. In 1738 an epidemic of Small Pox took the lives of several early Wilmington residents and it is here that they are buried. *(See the handout for a Walking Tour of The Olde Burying Ground.)*

V4 First Congregational Church, Middlesex Avenue, 1865. Upon formation of the Town in 1730, the First Congregational Society was formed and served as the Town's only religious institute until 1832. By 1809, the first building had become inadequate and a new one was constructed in 1814. In 1864, that church burned and in 1865 $12,000 was raised and the present church was constructed and remains a well-preserved, handsomely detailed example of late Italianate / Classical style. Decorative details include: rustication, groins, an arched entry set in a pilastered and pedimented pavilion, and a steeple with a classically derived decoration. The tall windows on the main body of the church have arched heads and label moldings.

VS Squire William Blanchard, Jr. House, 200 Middlesex Avenue, 1724. This was the home of one of Wilmington's wealthiest residents during the early 1800s. While the most prominent part of the Federal style house was built in the early 1800s, the rear section dates from 1724. The son of Col. William Blanchard, William Jr. was for some time the state inspector of hops. He was paid a generous annual salary of $2,000, equivalent to that of the Governor of Massachusetts. The manuscript, "Legal Briefs of William Blanchard," is part of the Arthur Thomas Bond Collection and contains invoices of bops purchased between 1816 and 1820, as well as some of Squire Blanchard's legal notes.

V6 Animal Pound, Glen Road, 1814.
In 1796, a committee was appointed at Town Meeting to build a "Pound with stones." In 1813, it was voted to build a new pound and in February of 1814 Squire William Blanchard gave to the Town a lot "two rods square" (about 10 yards) for this purpose. It is likely that use of the pound continued well into the mid 1800s. In 1930, stones were added during the excavation of Middlesex Avenue for a water main.

MS Rogers Park Memorial, Middlesex Avenue and Glen Road

V7 Bond-Blaisdell House, 1833.

VS Joseph McMahon House, c.1930.

V9 Bond-Skilton-McMahon House, 1815-1850.

Sl Old Centre Schoolhouse, Middlesex Avenue, pre-1839. In 1839, and after decades of debate, Town residents voted to add a fifth schoolhouse to the district school system. Joseph Bond, Jr sold the parcel of land upon which this schoolhouse was built to the inhabitants of the Centre Village Historic District. After serving as the Centre Schoolhouse, it accommodated the Town Library until 1969 and currently serves as the headquarters for the Fourth of July Celebrations Committee.

S2 Swain School, Middlesex Avenue, 1914. "I have never seen a building which in my judgment is better fitted and equipped for High School purposes.,.. than you have here. I am surprised that you have been able to get such a building for the amount you have stated." So said Mr. Richard S. Beyer, Inspector for the District Police, after inspecting the newly erected school. The school was built to accommodate the growing population and replaced the Centre School, which became the Centre Grammar School. In 1951, with the opening of the new high school, the Swain School became a junior high school and later served as an elementary school until 1979. The Swain School was

named for established teachers Henrietta ("Etta") and Carrie Swain, daughters of Charles, founder of Wilmington's library and well-respected citizen. Presently, it accommodates WCTV and parts of the police department.

S3 Buzzell School, 15 School Street, 1935. Currently the Senior Citizens Center, this wooden, one-story building with simple Colonial Revival features consists of a hip roofed main section and short, gabled end wings projecting forward. It also features a central entry and cupola. It was named in honor of Dr. Daniel Buzzell, the physician who delivered nearly every child born in Wilmington in the early 1900s.

V10 George Eames Cottage, 136 Middlesex Avenue, c.1854-1856 (or Bond-Eames Cottage).

V11 Thomas D. Bond House, 126 Middlesex Avenue, 1856. Currently the Rectory for St. Thomas of Villanova Church.

V12 Otis Buck-Adams House, 127 Middlesex Avenue, 1850. Cyrus Adams bought this parcel of land from Thomas D. Bond and built this Greek Revival-style home with side-hall plan, bay window and pedimented gable facade. Cyrus and Sanford Adams together built a coffin factory on land south of this lot. In 1859, the house was bought by Otis Buck, son of Nathan and Abigail. He was a butcher by trade who later built a barn and slaughterhouse at the rear of the lot. Around 1875, Otis Buck presented to the Town the land that is now the Town Common. Born in 1825, Mr. Buck occupied this house until his death in 1901.

V13 Town Common, Middlesex Avenue & Church Street, 1875-1899

V14 Hudson-Roman House, 161 Church Street, 1897. This beautifully maintained Queen-Anne style house now serves as the school department's administration building. It is a large 2 ½-story, hip-roofed house clad in clapboards and shingles. It features a circular turret with finial, bay windows, projecting gables and porches on the first and second stories.

M16 Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Middlesex Avenue at Wilmington Memorial Library

V15 Nichols Homestead, 187 Middlesex Avenue, 1760. This single example of Georgian-style architecture in the Centre Village District is a two-story, five bay house with a large center chimney and projecting, pedimented central entry. The Nichols Funeral Home business has existed since 1870 and is now operated by the Lyford family.

V16 Capt Joseph Bond, Sr. House, 191 Middlesex Avenue, 1795. This was the home of the founder of the Bond Cracker Baking Factory and the site of the original bakery. Captain Bond opened the bakery shortly after moving to Wilmington in 1802. The business passed on to his sons in 1811 who enlarged it considerably. It was devastated by fire in 1864 and then re-established in Boston. The house survived the fire and became, for more than 100 years, the parsonage for the First Congregational Church.

V17 Warren Eames Cottage, 205 Middlesex Avenue, 1850.

V18 Wilmington Arts Center, 219 Middlesex Avenue, 1842. Originally constructed for the Free Will Baptist Society, the first religious organization established to coexist with the First Congregational Church. By 1864, parish membership had declined so much that the property was offered and sold to the Town in the aftermath of the Church fire. It was altered to accommodate Town offices and also used by high school students until 1888. In 1985, it became a center for the arts and is still Town-owned. Some of the original features are gone, however, comer pilasters supporting a cornice, the facade's pedimented gable and the arrangement of three windows on each side of the main body of the building remain on this Greek Revival design.

M4 Robert W. Parent Memorial, Middlesex Avenue at Wilmington Arts Center

V19 Wildwood Cemetery, Wildwood Street, c.1795.

M3 Veterans Graves, Simpson Lot, Old Soldiers Lot, Wildwood Cemetery

We hope you have enjoyed this historic walking tour. Your comments are sincerely appreciated and welcomed. Please contact the Wilmington Historical Commission I Town Museum at 430 Salem Street, Wilmington, 978-658-5475.