

ca. 1831-35

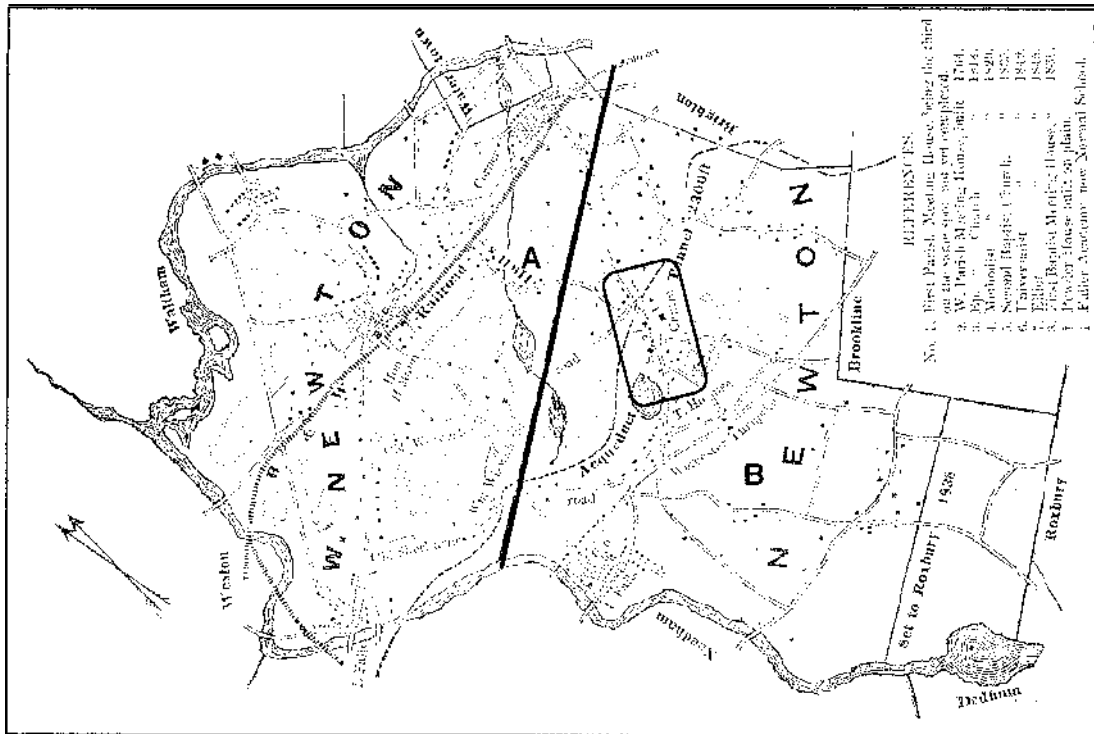


The most important thing to notice on this map is that the heaviest settlement in Newton is along the railway that runs through Newton Corner and West Newton, which (along with the mill villages at Upper and Lower Falls) were the only significant or visible "villages" during this period.

The rest of Newton was occupied primarily by people living on scattered farms, who came together for worship, town meeting, or to attend school.

Commonwealth Avenue, Walnut Street, and Beacon Street are all missing from this map because they had not been built yet.

Newton Centre is shown primarily as a slight widening of the road that leads from Newton Corner to Upper Falls and on to Dedham.



What Is Newton Centre the Center OF? Planning for "The Newtons"

A physical center [of Newton] could be mathematicall^y determined, [but] because of the early pattern of dispersed settlement ... the town had no definable population center.

In 1714, Lieutenant Joseph But-nap was hired to find the "centre" of Newton in order to settle a controversy between the residents in the north and south sections of the town over the siting of a new meeting house. The "centre" was determined to be near the corner of Homer and Centre streets, and the meeting house was erected there in 1721.

Newton Centre remained isolated throughout the first half of the nineteenth century while north-side villages served by the Boston and Worcester Railroad began to grow.

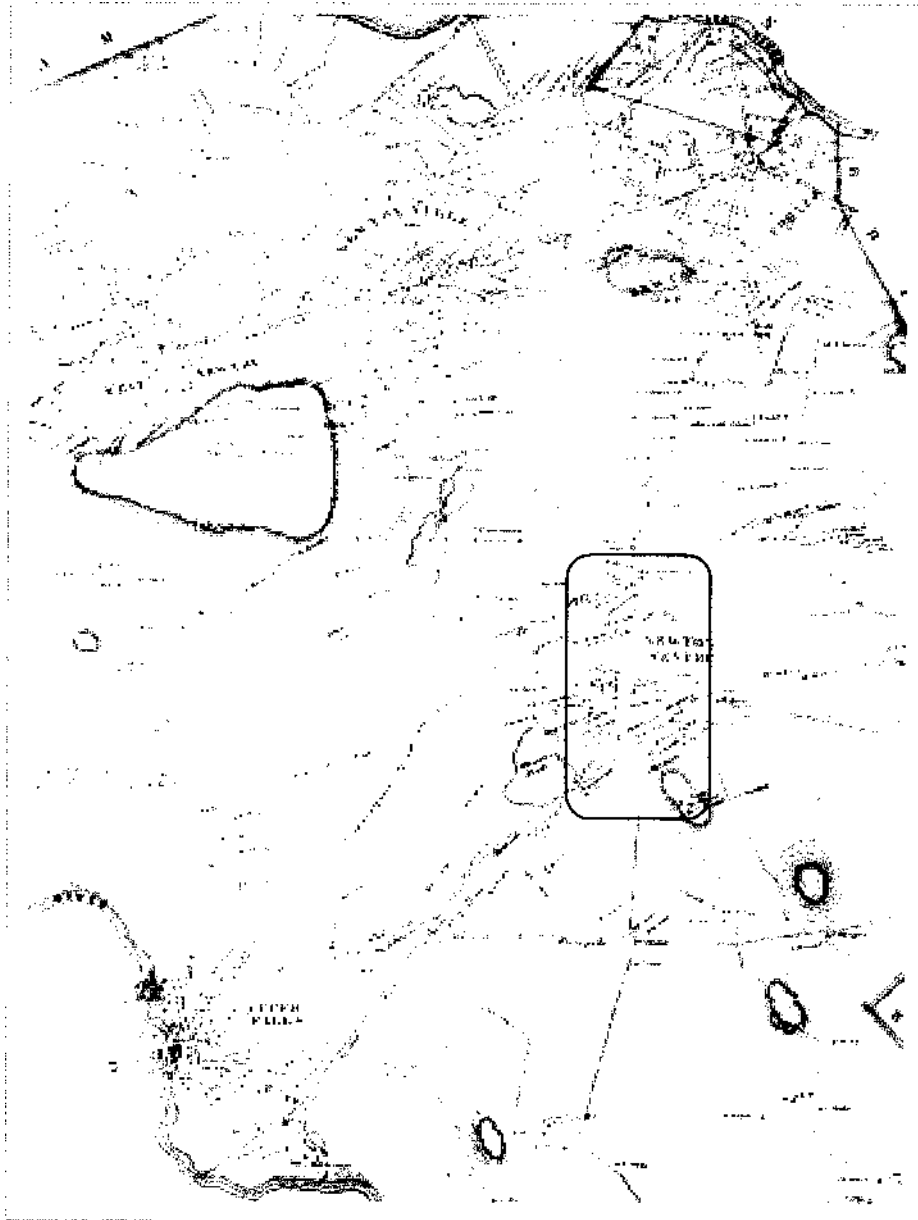
[In the 1840s] the proposed location [for Newton's new high school] was at Hull's Crossing, later called Newtonville. The high school was built there in 1839.

The Vest Newton Meeting House was renovated to become the Town Hall in 1848 and updated to become the Cit^y Hall in 1874. The seat of government remained in West Newton until 1932 when the present- Cit^y Hall was built nearer the "centre."

— from the catalog for *Ri rers. Roads e- Rai Is: iflapping NeiTtoll*; exhibit researched & developed by Susan Abele, 2001; catalog available through the

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1855

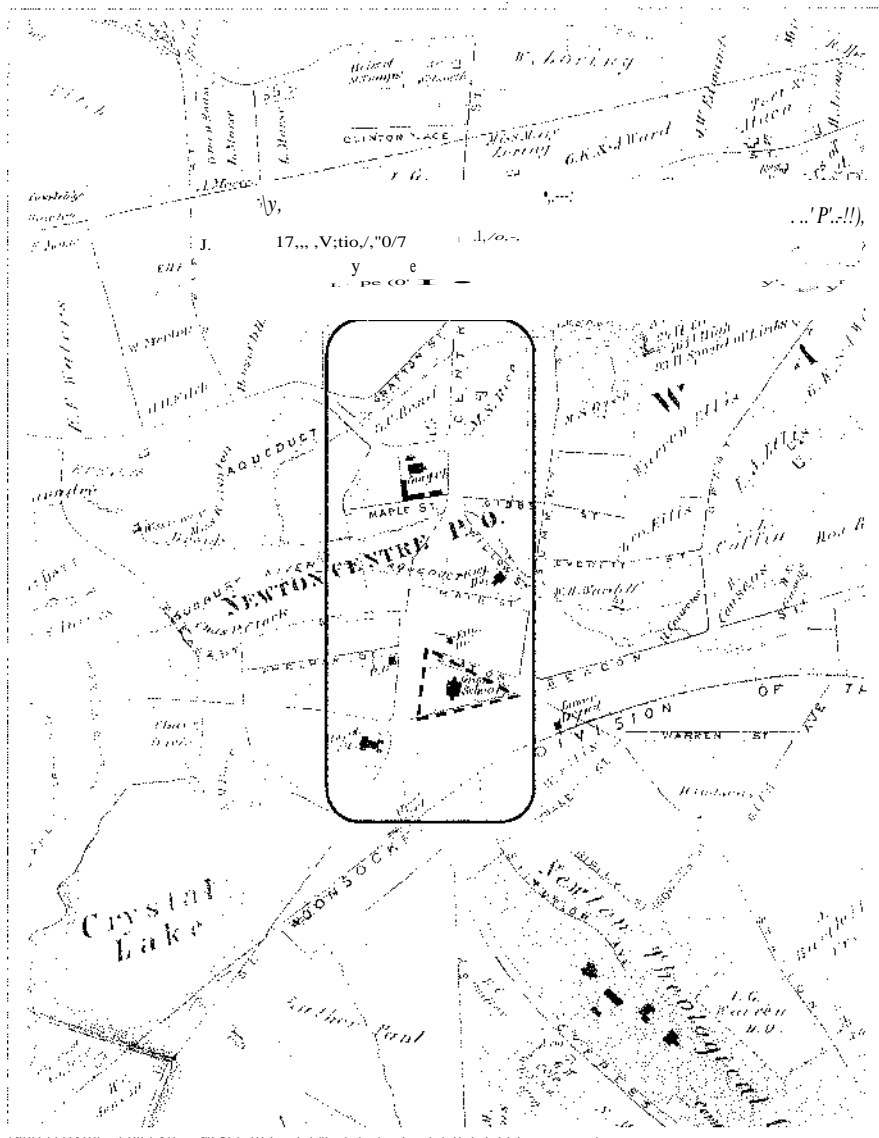


The most important things to notice on this map are the addition of Newtonville as a new commuter "village" along the railway between Newton Corner and West Newton, the new Sudbur^y Aqueduct that runs just north of Newton Centre (bringing water into Boston), and the new rail line that runs just south of Newton Centre. Beginning in 1857, this new line was used to transport the gravel till used to create a new Boston neighborhood in the Back Bay. Gravel trains ran night and da^y along this line for decades. One portion of this rail line paralleled what is now known as Needham Street, and is still in place but seldom used. Another portion became part of the MBTA Green D line, and is still in use for passengers.

On this map, Walnut Street now runs from just south of Bullough's Pond to the new village of Newtonville, but there is still no Commonwealth Avenue, and Beacon Street west of Newton Centre is marked as "proposed new road."

At this period, Newton Centre still looks mostly like a widening of Centre Street. Though there are man^y more names listed along that stretch of street than in the 1830s, Newton Centre still had ver^y few residents compared to Newton Corner, West Newton, or Upper Falls.

ca. 1870



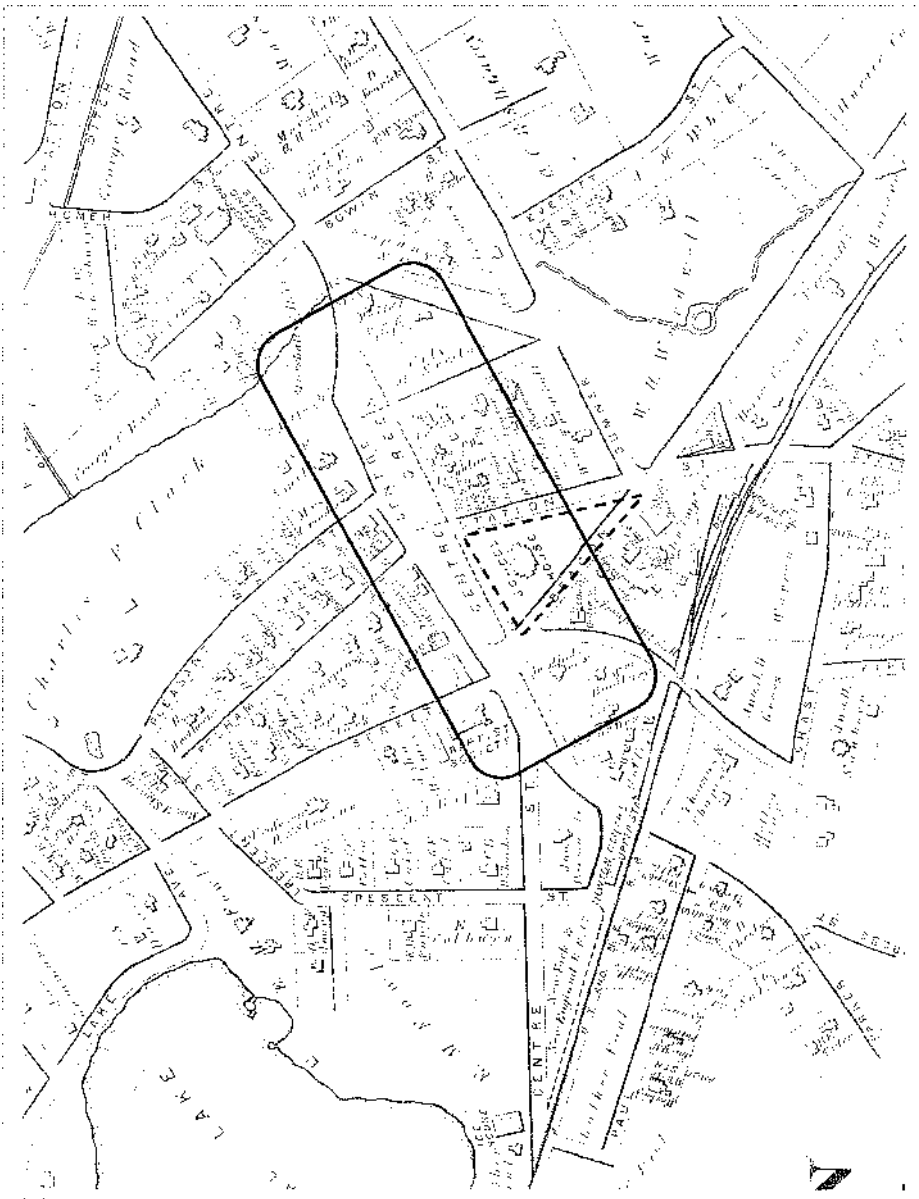
This map shows the early subdivision of land in Newton Centre for new residents.

This is one of the first maps to show the now-familiar "triangle" formed by Beacon, Langley, and Centre streets.

The "common" is still visible as a swathe of public space along the eastern edge of Centre Street, from the rail line on the south to "Maple Street" (now Bowen St.) on the north.

On this map, Beacon Street is shown as significantly smaller and less important than Centre Street.

The railroad still has a separate upper and lower depot.



In the 1870s, the rail line that had been transporting gravel for the tilling of the Back Bay began offering more frequent passenger service. Compared to 6 passenger trains a day in 1869, there were 11 daily passenger trips in 1893.

Partly in anticipation, and partly as a result, of more this change in rail service to and from Boston, land in Newton Centre was rapidly subdivided and sold as houselots to Boston commuters. As this group of residents grew, new businesses appeared to serve them, and some previous residents and businesses closed or moved elsewhere.

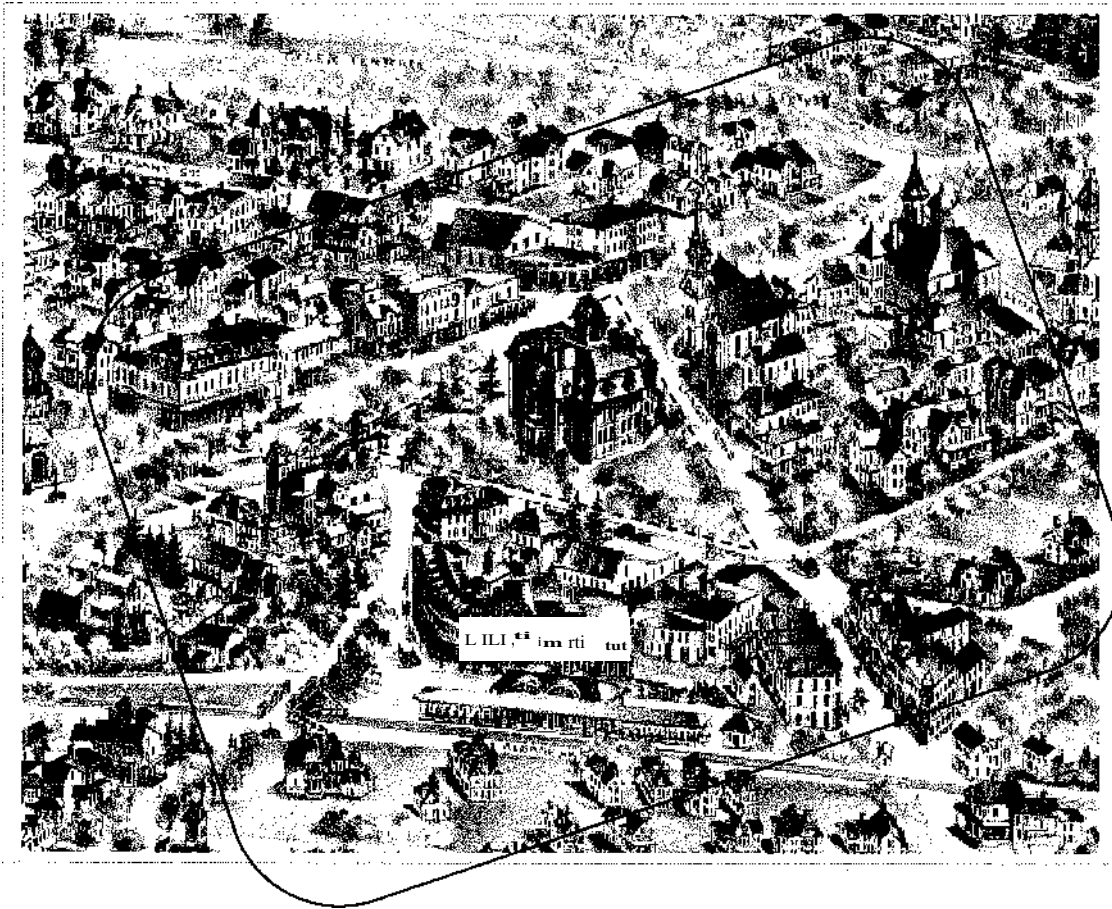
In contrast to earlier maps, this map labels the "upper" depot as the Newton Centre Station, though it still shows the lower depot as "depot." The "Station Street" on this map is now known as Langley Road. Union Street does not appear on the map.

The "Centre Green" is still visible, clearly labeled, and bounded on all sides, even its eastern edge, by streets. But the "triangle" is becoming clearer, and contains the new Mason School, labeled as "school house."

Beacon Street (at least east of Centre Street) now seems more prominent than on earlier maps.

Newton Centre, Massachusetts, 1874. The map shows the location of the 'upper' depot, labeled as 'Newton Centre Station', and the 'lower depot' labeled as 'depot.' The 'Station Street' on this map is now known as Langley Road. Union Street does not appear on the map.

1897 artist's "aerial view" (before aerial photography, obviously)



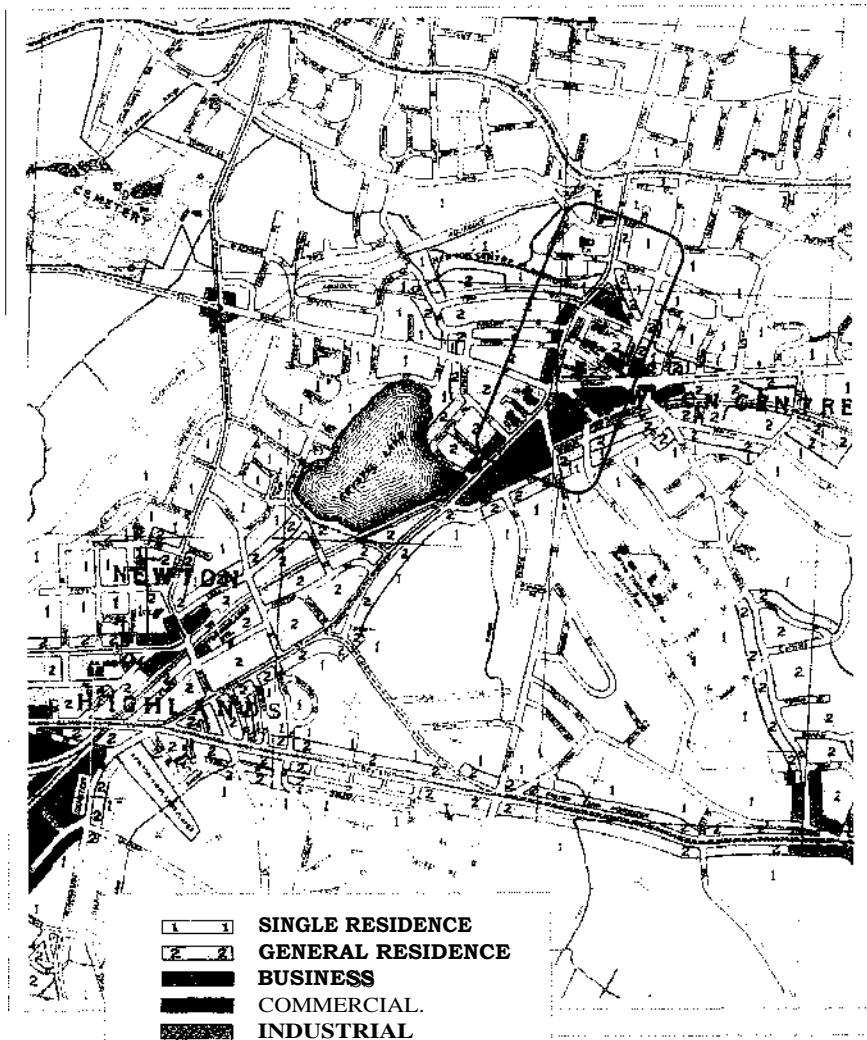
In the 1870s, one source had called Newton Centre "Saints' Rest," because so many of its residents were clergy or retired clergy. By the 1890s, the area had become a thriving "commuter village" and commercial center, with stores catering to those same commuters.

In this view, Newton Centre looks like a prosperous small city. The "green" is still visible, and is still bounded by streets or paths on all sides, but the view is dominated by the buildings and train station.

Though the drawing shows buildings of many heights and sizes, a significant number are 3-4 stories tall. Because most people still walked to stores, stores were located near homes. Businessman Mellon Bray built Bray's Block in the 1890s. That curved, yellow-brick commercial building, which still stands on Union Street, appears in this view. Bray later also built the Bradford Court Apartments, at the corner of Union Street and Herrick Rd., in 1913 (so they do not appear on this map).

There is now a single railroad station, designed primarily for passengers. An overpass at Herrick Road anticipates the depression of the entire rail line below street level and the creation of grade-separated crossings for other streets, in 1905-1906.

1921 zoning map & key



1921 saw the publication of Newton's first zoning plan. Most of the city was zoned for "single residences," and is shown in white on the new zoning map.

Other areas - designated for buildings housing two or more families, for a mix of residences and businesses, or for commercial or industrial use - are shown in color.

Zoning aimed to promote the separation of land uses that had been mixed together in earlier periods. The Newton plan partly reflected the interests of the city's growing population of automobile owners, who could get to stores, schools, and church easily, even if these places were located far from their homes and from rail transportaton.

The original north-south orientation of Newton Centre along the Centre Street "common" is harder to see on this map than on earlier ones. The map seems to envision both Beacon Street east of Newton Centre, and Centre Street from Newton Centre to Newton Highlands, as continous corridors of mixed or "general residence" use. But it shows a clear boundary on Newton Centre's northern side between these uses and single-family residences.

USES PERMITTED

SINGLE RESIDENCE DISTRICTS - Single family houses with privets, garages and stables. Churches, schools, clubs, hospitals and institutions, farms, and greenhouses by permission of Board of Aldermen.

GENERAL RESIDENCE DISTRICTS - Houses for more than one family, tenement and boarding houses, clubs, schools, hospitals and institutions, farms, greenhouses, private garages, and stables.

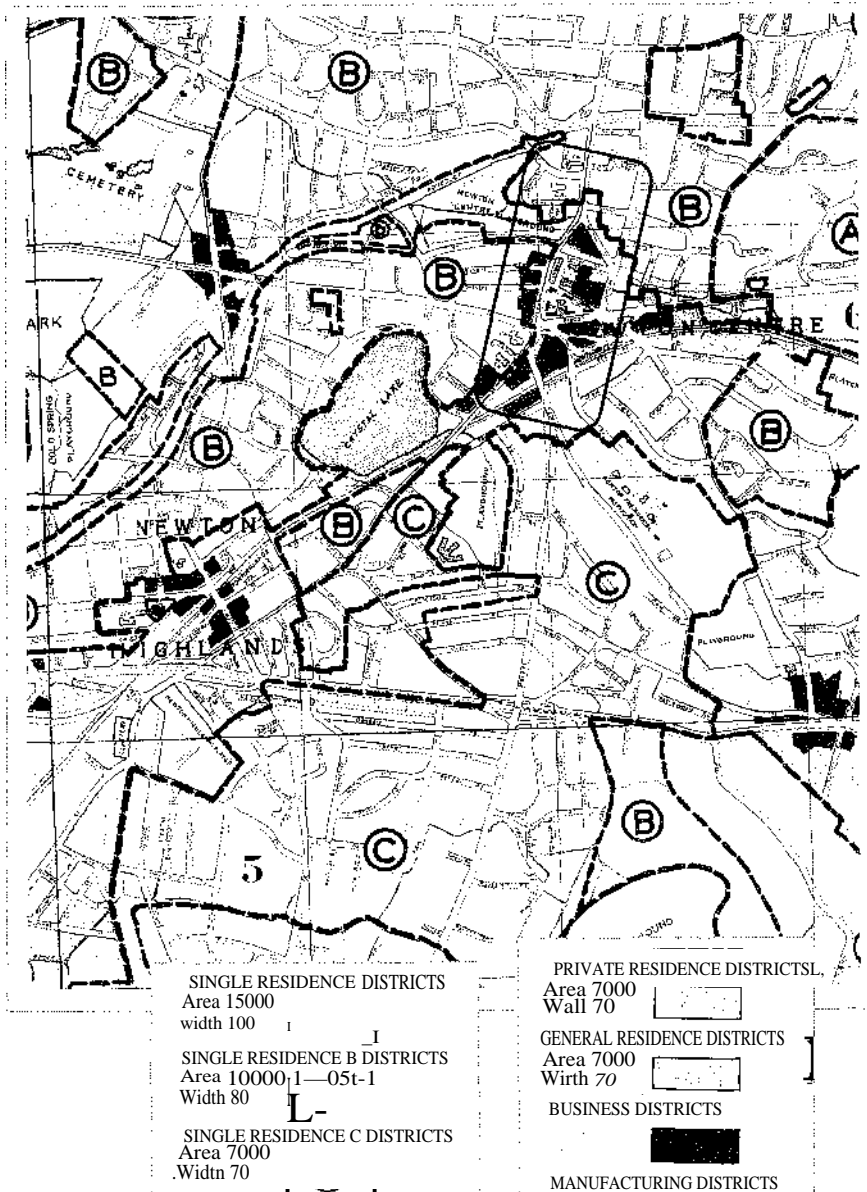
BUSINESS DISTRICTS - Stores, offices, mess-halls, fire and police stations, public buildings, ordinary local business. No factories or nuisances by permission of Board of Aldermen.

COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS - Wholesale and light manufacturing not detrimental to neighborhood. No use permitted where there is noise, odor, gas, or dust. Certain uses may be definitely prohibited.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS - Any industry or manufacturing is permitted including uses prohibited in commercial districts, provided permission is obtained from Board of Aldermen.

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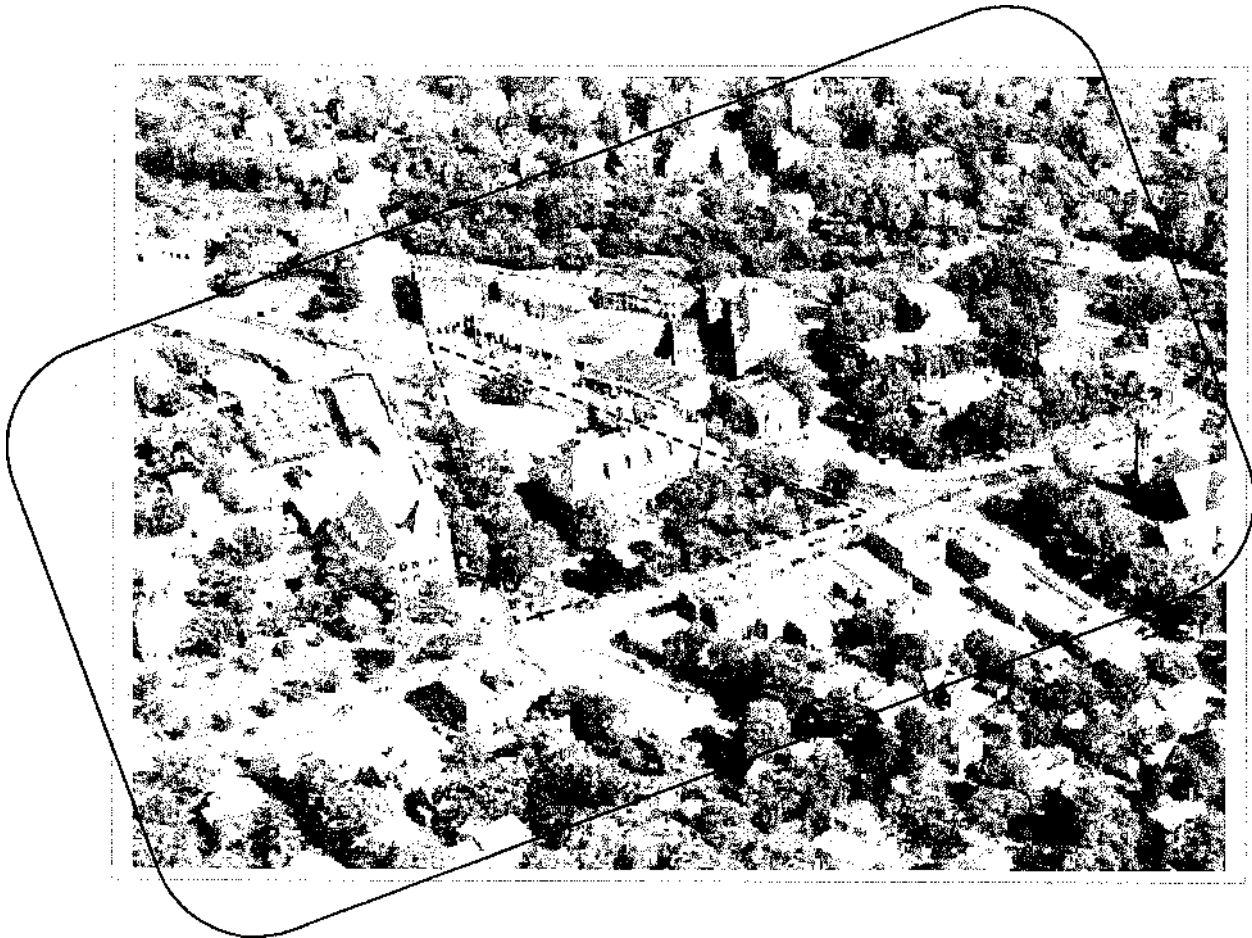
1944 zoning map & key



The city's rezoning in the 1940s subdivided the old "single residence" zone into categories, ranging from A for the largest/most expensive/most widely spaced houses, through B, C, and "private residence" zones before reaching the "general residence" zone.

These categories broke up, visually, some of the mixed-use or general residence areas shown as continuous corridors on the 1921 map. As a result, the 1940s zoning map is more complicated.

1946 aerial photograph

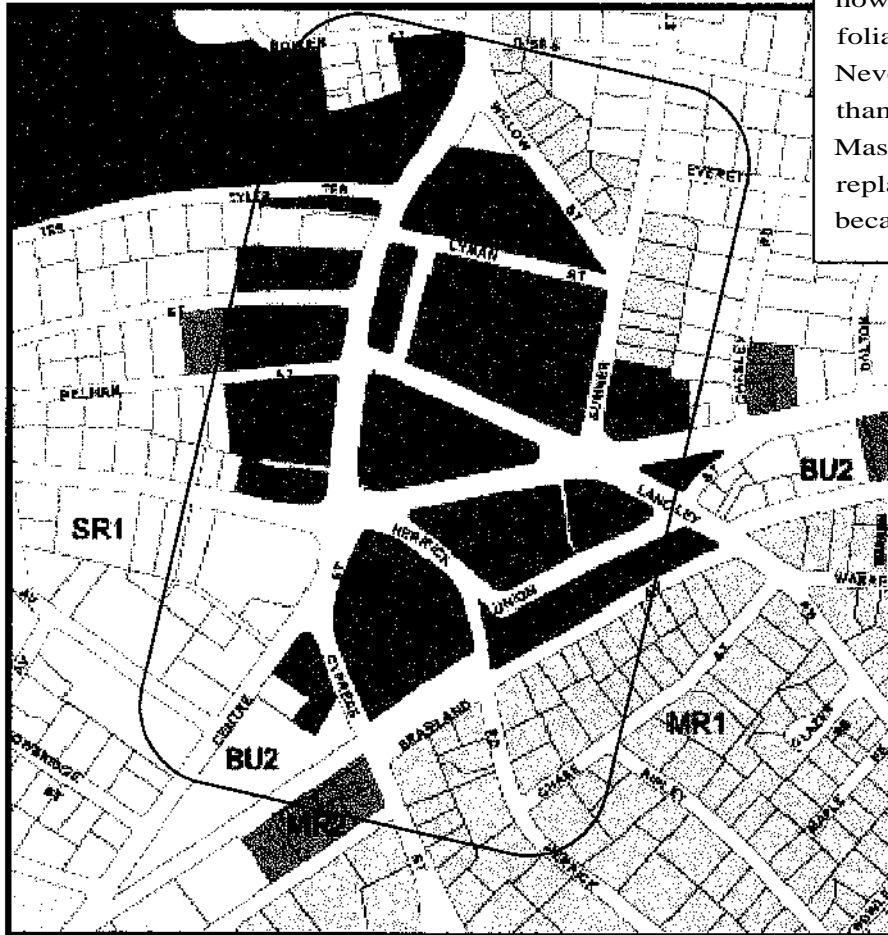


In 1946 Newton Centre still looked, from the air, quite a bit like the 1890s commuter village, in part because of the many mature street trees. But the tree blocks bordered by open space along the eastern side of Centre St. no longer feel like a continuous "common," perhaps in part because the corners at the intersection of Beacon and Centre streets have been rounded off to speed the flow of automobile traffic.

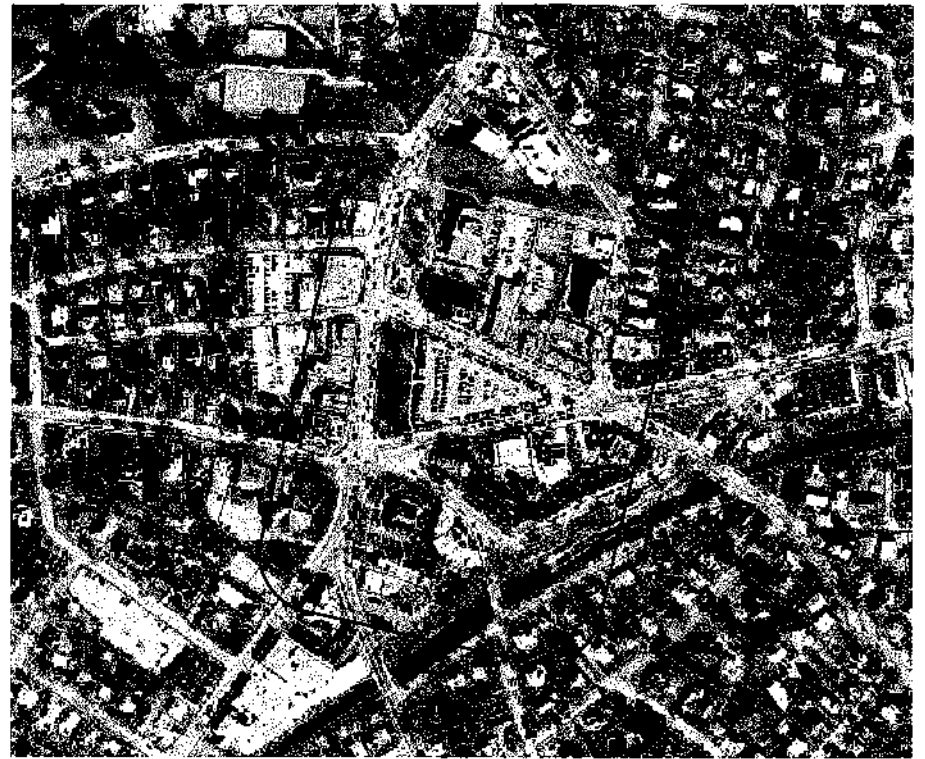
The buildings along Beacon Street, facing the Mason School, include a movie theater and a bowling alley.

Compared to the original 1921 zoning, both the 1940s and current zoning show a much narrower swath of uses other than single-family residences just west of Centre Street in Newton Centre.

ca 2000 zoning



The 1946 aerial photo above was taken when the trees were in full leaf, however, and this one from circa 2000 was taken in winter, to ensure that foliage didn't obscure views of the buildings (i.e., the taxable property!). Nevertheless, it is clear that far more land is dedicated to parking in 2000 than in 1946. Some land was taken for parking lots by eminent domain. The Mason School, in the triangle formed by Beacon, Centre, and Langley, was replaced by a new school and demolished in the 1950s; and its site also became a parking lot.



ca 2000 orthophoto

circa 1893-1901 "THE COMMON seen from Institution Avenue." Institution Avenue is now Herrick Road. It seems unlikely that you could see these buildings along the western side of Centre Street from that vantage point; the photo is more likely take from Beacon Street. The common was the strip of grass and trees that ran along the eastern edge of three blocks of Centre Street, from south of Beacon Street to north of Langley. It is labeled on maps from the 1 R7(lc



circa 1900 CENTRE ST across from the common. These buildings were on the western side of Centre Street, at least a block north of Beacon St.



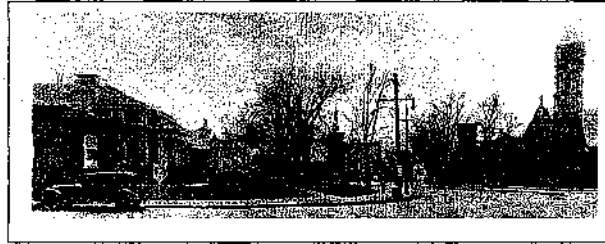
circa 1909 CENTRE & BEACON STS. The hay wagon crossing Centre St. could easily give the incorrect impression that this photo is from an earlier period than the photo at right, which was taken from essentially the same vantage point, but shows a streetcar.



1907 CENTRE & BEACON STS. Taken from much the same vantage point as the photo at left, but 2 years earlier.



1920s UNION ST seen from CENTRE ST, showing the bank (first photo). The second photo in this panorama looks south along Centre Street, between The Women's Club (now Picadilly II) and the First Baptist Church.



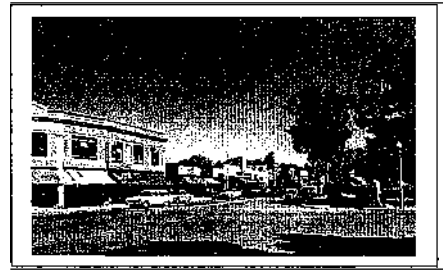
1935 This MASON SCHOOL replaced the mansard-roofed structure shown in an earlier photograph from the 1870s, in the triangle of Beacon, Langley, & Centre Sts. This photo was probably taken standing on the grounds of the First Baptist Church. This school was being used for grades 2-6 only; grades K-2 attended the Rice School, a couple of blocks north on Centre St.



1949 CENTRE and BEACON Sts., seen from the common. This photo was taken from almost the same vantage point as the 1907 and 1909 photographs above, though this bench-sitter is a bit farther south than the people in the 1907 photo.



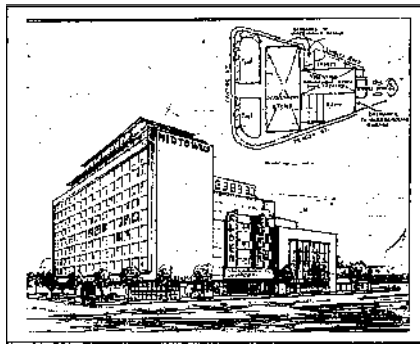
Circa 1950 CENTRE and BEACON Streets; from a color postcard. Taken from much the same vantage point as the earlier photos of the same intersection. This photo feels much less "green" than some of the earlier ones, probably for several reasons: it was taken standing closer to the intersection of Beacon and Centre, streets have been widened and corners rounded off, to speed automobile traffic, and some of the large street trees in earlier photos appear to have died.



1970s Chandler-Levy Hardware.



1979 The Newton Centre Market (grocery store).



proposed 1961 on the Mason School site. The city solicited bids both for demolishing the old school and for buildings that might replace it (and provide additional property tax revenues). Some proposals received were for housing; some were for a mixture of residential and commercial uses. This proposal was for a motel and restaurant.

None of these 1960s proposals was accepted or built.