Billerica Center Historical Walking Tour

By Mary Kate McCarron

1. Clara Sexton House – Start here at 36 Concord Road. Then walk north to the intersection of Cummings Street and cross at the crosswalk to the Common.

The Clara Sexton House

The Clara Sexton House is home to the Billerica Historical Society and is located at 36 Concord Road. Reverend Henry Cummings, the fourth minister of the Unitarian Church and also a Harvard Graduate, had it remodeled in 1763. Cummings was a pastor for a total of 50 years; he was also a distinguished scholar and leading character in the Amity area. It was restored in 1936. The Clara Sexton House was granted to the City of Cambridge if 10 families petitioned the court to incorporate and were allowed to change the town’s name to Billerica. On the other side of the marker there is another plaque that remembers the 14 members petitioned because of the liberty pole were about the townspeople’s feelings and thoughts about the British Rule. Around the year 1796, the Billerica Colonial Minute Men erected the Liberty Pole in Billerica. In 2010 the Pole was refurbished, had new stain put on it and a new red stocking cap.

2.stown Meeting House Marker – Stop at this Marker on the Common.

Site of the first Meeting House

The marker located directly next to the Bandstand notes the general area where the first meeting house in Billerica stood. The first meeting house was completed in 1660. The house was 30 feet by 42 feet by 24 feet with a thatched roof. The building committee included Ralph Hill Sr., George Farley and Jonathan Danforth. Unfortunately, the meeting house was destroyed by a fire. The plaque, originally placed there in 1901, provides information about the town and its destruction by fire. The plaque, originally placed there in 1901, the Billerica Historical Society restored and rededicated the plaque. The plaque below it discusses the town’s origin. Visitors to Billerica would tell “Billerica to her heroes, in grateful recognition of that steadfastness of purpose, devotion to principle, loyalty to country, and trust in God, which enabled men to die for Liberty and Union.” It was dedicated on October 8th, 1873 and originally had cannon balls next to it that fed a path to the Parrot Rifle. Some of the battles mentioned include New Bern, and Gettysburg.

3. Band Stand – Directly behind you will be the Band Stand.

The Bandstand

Known by many as the Gazebo, the bandstand sits on the common and was completed in the 1890s. It is a trade mark of the town and is found on many postcards and paintings. Many local organizations hold events at the Bandstand. The structure stands 25 feet high. It was dedicated to the soldiers of Billerica who fought in the Civil War and has 20 names etched in stone of brave soldiers from Billerica who had lost their lives during the war. The memorial was dedicated with a plaque with the quote “Billerica to her heroes, in grateful recognition of that steadfastness of purpose, devotion to principle, loyalty to country, and trust in God, which enabled men to die for Liberty and Union.” It was dedicated on October 8th, 1873 and originally had cannon balls next to it that fed a path to the Parrot Rifle. Some of the battles mentioned include New Bern, and Gettysburg.

4. Liberty Pole – You will look to your right on the Common and find the Liberty Pole.

Liberty Pole

You can see the Liberty Pole on the common near the bandstand. Often times, the pole may have a stocking cap on top. Long ago, this would signify that a town meeting was going to happen. They were used all throughout the colonies. The poles were built either before or during the Revolutionary War. The meetings that were held because of the liberty pole were about the townpeople’s feelings and thoughts about the British Rule. Around the year 1796, the Billerica Colonial Minute Men erected the Liberty Pole in Billerica. In 2010 the Pole was refurbished, had new stain put on it and a new red stocking cap.

5. Civil War Monument – You will walk north on the Common to the Civil War Monument.

The Civil War Monument

The Civil War Monument, made of Westonite granite, is found on the common very close to the Parrot Rifle. The structure stands 25 feet high. It was dedicated to the soldiers of Billerica who fought in the Civil War and has 20 names etched in stone of brave soldiers from Billerica who had lost their lives during the war. The memorial was dedicated with a plaque with the quote “Billerica to her heroes, in grateful recognition of that steadfastness of purpose, devotion to principle, loyalty to country, and trust in God, which enabled men to die for Liberty and Union.” It was dedicated on October 8th, 1873 and originally had cannon balls next to it that fed a path to the Parrot Rifle. Some of the battles mentioned include New Bern, and Gettysburg.

6. Parrot Rifle – You will walk a short distance north on the Common to the Parrot Rifle.

The Parrot Rifle

The Parrot rifle is located on the common near Boston Road. It was placed on the common in 1907. It is neither receiving because the rifle is actually large black cannon. Originally, the cannon had cannonballs and a pathway that led to the Civil War Monument. It was made in New York, purchased by a Billerica merchant, Sidney Bull, and eventually donated to the town. The cannon itself weighs 4,200 pounds and its base weighs 2 tons. The large weapon can be found at the Billerica Historical Society and also a Harvard Graduate, had it remodeled in 1763. Cummings was a pastor for a total of 50 years; he was also a distinguished scholar and leading character in the Amity area. It was restored in 1936. The Clara Sexton House was granted to the City of Cambridge if 10 families petitioned because of the liberty pole were about the townspeople’s feelings and thoughts about the British Rule. Around the year 1796, the Billerica Colonial Minute Men erected the Liberty Pole in Billerica. In 2010 the Pole was refurbished, had new stain put on it and a new red stocking cap.

This Walking Tour has been created by Girl Scout Mary Kate McCarron, Troop 61013, Billerica, MA.

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Public Library, located at 15 Concord Road. It is the last stop on the historical walking tour.
8. Sabba Day House – Head north on Boston Road and take a right at the intersection with Andover Road. Cross the 3rd crosswalk on Andover Road. Arrive at 20 Andover Road.

9. First Congregational Church – Walk west on Andover Road.

The First Congregational Church was also previously known as the Orthodox Church. The church is located at 18 Andover Road and was constructed in 1830. In 1843 the building was completed, and was led by John Sturtevast. In 1843, Reverend Dr. D. Stearns led the building's initial from 1843 until 1848. The church began with just 25 members and was just 60 feet by 40 feet. The church was constructed by a local man named Reuben Duren.

10. Thaddeus Brown House – Walk west on Andover Road until you come to the crosswalk. Cross the 3rd crosswalk on Andover Road and then cross at the intersection of Andover and Boston Roads.

Thaddeus Brown House

In 1832, Thaddeus Brown married Susannah Crosby and he then began building the new couple a house. The house is also referred to by another one of its owners at a later time period, Luther Faulkner. The house still stands on the corner of Andover and Boston Road. Brown, along with Sadies Howe also used the house as a place to run a medical practice. Brown suddenly died in 1839, but Howe continued the two’s work for the rest of his life. In 1835, the First Church of Billerica was organized and the meetinghouse was turned into a church. The church was donated to the town. In 1840, the church was sold to the Congregational Church.

11. Howe School – Take a right on Boston Road. Walk north until you come to the Howe School.

Howe School

The Howe School was completed in 1852, after Dr. Zadock Howe died in the March of 1851. His will indicated that Howe had saved enough money for a school to be built. The school was placed on the “Evertt Lot” and was bought from the Ishael Everett Farm. The building’s style is similar to the Greek Revival Period and was initially made up of one room downstairs and one room upstairs. Both were heated by wood stoves. It gave students a chance to obtain a good education until they could move on to the First Orthodox Church. The school was constructed by a Lowell architect named Daniel Bean. In 1844 the school was taken over by the town of Billerica. Except for the removal of four chimneys, the school remains virtually the same as it was when it was first opened for learning. In 1915, a new school was constructed.

12. Washington Oak Marker – Cross Boston Road at the crosswalk near the Town Hall. Walk south on Boston Road until you reach the Washington Oak Marker which is located near 373 Boston Road.

Washington Oak

The Washington Oak has always given locals a sense of pleasure, so much so that Billerica's flag includes a tree in the background on its flag. From 1855-1861 Reverend Dr. D. Stearns had the town expand the building to its present-day size. Today it is a thriving congregation. The name changed to the First Congregational Church in 1929 when members voted to make changes in the church's ownership and constitution. The tree was renamed the Washington Oak.

13. Danforth House Marker – Continue to walk south on Boston Road.

The Danforth House was built in 1804 by Jonathan Bower on the corner of Boston and Concord Roads.

14. Locke House – Continue to walk south on Boston Road until you reach the Locke House.

Joseph Locke House

This house was constructed by a local man named Reuben Duren around 1789. Locke’s family is related to the Stearns’ family for many generations. In the early 20th century the house was transformed into a bed and breakfast hotel named the Hill House. The house was purchased by Dr. Charles Winning and the house was restored.

15. Kohlrausch Fountain – Continue south on Boston Road, cross at the crosswalk at the intersection of Boston Road and River Street. Stop at the Island in this intersection at the Kohlrausch Fountain.

The Kohlrausch Fountain

You will find this fountain on the River Street Island. It was donated to the town in 1912 by Charles H. Kohlrausch's family. During his life, Kohlrausch, in the Tarry Mills, also served as a town moderator, chairman of the Selectmen, water commissioner, town tax collector, and Superintendent of the Chemical Works in North Billerica. Kohlrausch was responsible for a large amount of the town’s progress. After Charles Kohlrausch Jr. died, this fountain was installed. It was first placed in a spot in front of the Dr. Zadock Howe School until 1930 when it was moved to its current location. The fountain was sculpted by Daniel C. Cheek, who is famous for his statues of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. and for the Concord Minuteman.

16. Bowers House – Continue south on Boston Road crossing over the Boston Road and River Street intersection. Arrive at the Bowers House. The Bowers House is located at One Concord Road.

The Bowers House

Located at One Concord Road is Dr. William Bowers’ House. Dr. William Bowers was born in Billerica in the year 1744. Bowers graduated from Harvard in 1769 and moved to Billerica to practice medicine. The doctor continued his profession until he died in 1820. He was a proponent of the coming of River Street that was previously part of Reverend Samuel Ruggles estate. In 1804 the construction of his brick and mansion was completed. People have speculated that a hidden room exists in the house to hide occupants during the War of 1812. The house was owned by the Bowers family until 1871 when his daughter Fanny passed away. William Bowers' daughters were unusual women who were also spinster. They went on to establish the Bowers Fund and the Bowers House Museum.

17. Bennett Library – Continue south on Boston Road until you come to the Bennett Library at 3 Concord Road.

Bennett Public Library

Built in 1881, the architecture of the building was designed in the height of the Victorian influence. Eleanor Bennett had this library designed by a Boston architect, and then provided the funds to have it built. It was the first public library in Billerica.

18. Unitarian Church – Continue south on Concord Road to the Unitarian Church, located at 5 Concord Road.

The Unitarian Church

The First Parish Church was built in 1777 at the cost of $6,594.50, which was defrayed by the sale of property. The congregation was established around 1658 and its first minister was Thomas Gill. The church building’s clock was installed as a gift for the town from Dracut Joseph Abbott. The value of the clock was $500, and at this time the town was still the official owners of the church. The pulpit was bought from the Second Church of Boston. It was the pulpit that Ralph Waldo Emerson preached from it during his time there. The church was rebuilt at a cost of $1,300 in 1868. In 1941, a successor of Paul Revere cast the bell in the hall. The building originally faced north but was turned 90 degrees east by an act that it could face the Common in 1844. A cannon ball was used as a ballast and stored in the cellar. Many buildings of earlier times, it had its dangers with fire. The church was burned down in 1968.

The church was rebuilt very close to the original specification of the building. The church is in possession of a collection of silver from the colonial times. The silver includes 12 pieces are some of the most elite in New England. The collection is currently on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.