

**A
Walking Tour
Of
Billerica Center**

by
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for the
Billerica Historical Commission
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We have to start somewhere and I shall assume we are on the steps of the First Parish Church in Billerica, on the west side of the Common.

The Common

The Common as we know it, is a 19th-century artifact. In the beginning (1655), it was part of the choice house-lot reserved for the renowned Captain Daniel Gookin, who the “then inhabitants of Shawshin” hoped would join them in establishing the town. It faced directly on the roads coming from the south (the road to Concord and the road to the Bay) with a strip of common land between them along Blanchard Brook. What is now Cumings Street, at the south end of the Common, joined the two roads from the south. Across the road to the Bay, the road to Andover (East Street) started in Cumings Street and headed straight east through what is now the parking lot of the Commons Plaza. The first meeting-house (1663) stood south of the corner of Concord Road and Cumings Street (not, alas, in the position marked by the Historical Society in 1910 on the Common itself).

Gookin never took up the lot. It thus reverted to “common land” additional to that south of Cumings Street along Blanchard’s Brook. East Street was also soon abandoned in favor of Sheldon’s Lane (now Andover Road). The empty house-lot became the “trayning-field” where young men took the oath of fidelity and sturdy farmers assembled for military practice. The second meeting-house (1694) was built on the north side of Cumings Street. In 1707, when Rev. Samuel Ruggles was called to “assist”, and eventually replace Rev. Samuel Whiting, the Town granted him eight acres “on the common westward of the meeting-house” and the present Common was nearly cut to size. That part of the common land south of Cumings Street was finally divided between several Proprietors in 1720.

By 1775/6 there was still no “green”. The third meeting-house (1739) stood on the Common, probably near the Civil War Soldiers’ Monument. There were five other buildings in sight. Oliver Abbott, retailer, occupied an old house at the south east (in the parking lot of the Commons Plaza). John Parker, tanner, occupied his own house at the south and also owned the “Ruggles Farm” at the southwest (Rev. Samuel Ruggles “mansion house”, ca. 1715 was moved to 5 River Street in 1973, to make way for the proposed new library). An old house at the northwest was owned by the heirs of Abel Fox. To the northeast, a “store” stood at the entrance to Sheldon’s Lane, owned by Solomon Pollard whose tavern was 200 yards north. The store-keeper, Ebenezer Bridge, had come to Billerica

from Chelmsford a new years before, was our first “merchant”, commanded a regiment at Bunker Hill and eventually rose to General in the Continental Army. He did not return to Billerica after the Revolution. The Common lay in the center of large farms.

The wave of prosperity, which the new nation finally came to enjoy, brought substantial change to the Common. The precise order of all events is not known, but the turning-point was about 1795, when stage-coaches began the first regular service through Billerica, both from Boston and from Salem, converging at “The Corner” and the entrance to the Middle Bridge across the Concord River (about 1.5 mi. north of the Common). We have no contemporary photographs, of course. Our best surrogate is Barber’s 1838 wood-cut, looking north across a rather desolate Common indeed. All of the buildings in view are post-Revolutionary, the youngest built in 1833. The pre-Revolutionary farmsteads at the south end of the Common are behind the sketcher.

Rueben Duren, the “master mechanic” (country carpenter) who introduced high-style “square” Federal houses to Billerica, sold his tavern at “The Corner” to Thomas Richardson and moved to the Center. He had arrived in Billerica at a propitious time.

Reuben, a native of Billerica, had been in Bedford, where he is remembered for the Stearns-Penniman House. First Parish in Billerica refused to admit him to communion when he wished to be married, because of a prior illegitimacy never satisfactorily explained away. His return to Billerica was probably encouraged by the marriage of his daughter to John Parker’s son Stephen, for whom he remodeled the old Ruggles mansion. He bought the old Foster farm at “The Corner” and, whether by design or out of necessity, enlarged it to serve as “The Tavern at the Corner”. There he entertained surveyors of the route for the proposed Middlesex Canal, and there was held the dinner celebratory of its ground-breaking.

Duren bought out the heirs of Rev. John Chandler. The description to Duren, third parcel, concludes: “east 8 rods 19 links to the Common, then south through the new meeting-house 11 rods to the northeast corner of the center school, with the understanding “that he does not convey the meeting-house, nor one-half of the joiner’s shop”. On the same day in September 1797, Duren deeded one-half acre on the westerly side of the common to the inhabitants of the Town of Billerica. The fourth meeting house was being raised; Rueben Duren was mechanic in charge!

First Parish Church

The original building, shown in Barber's sketch, looks unfamiliar. It faced north and sat farther forward, astride the boundary between former Common and the additional Chandler land. Not until 1844 was it turned to face the Common (a small cannon-ball in the Historical Society collections is said to have been the pivot point!). The Greek portico was added to the façade then, and the interior refurbished with pulpit and pews from the old Second Church in Boston. This is the form with which we are familiar. The fourth meeting house was burned shortly after Christmas 1967, but rebuilt with the substantial help of the town's people as a whole. Enough remained (including the original steeple) so that the present structure is an essentially faithful copy, inside and out, of the 1844 version.

Moving south along the west side of Concord Road, the Masonic Hall comes next.

Masonic Hall

Before 1790, the center schoolhouse was set here "in Stephen Parker's corner". It was replaced by the Billerica Academy (1820-1836), the building shown in Barber's sketch. This was converted to a store, shown in the sketch of 1858, which burned in 1876. The latter was promptly replaced by the present building, in a then more obviously Victorian style. After the Gardner Parker Hall on River Street burned in the Valentine Day's blizzard of 1940, Thomas Talbot Lodge, A.F. & M., remodeled the old store for its own use. Thus, the present façade is 1942; only the Italianate brackets under the eaves speak of earlier origins.

Old Town Hall 1895

Then the "old" Town Hall dedicated in 1895, from which the town offices have just been moved to a refurbished school building farther north down Boston Road. Gardner Parker (son of Stephen, living in the ancestral Kidder homestead on River Street) was chairman of the building committee and must have helped behind the scenes in persuading his cousin Ann Parker's heirs to part with a little more land to make room for the larger. It was the last great public building built in the Town, a handsome example of the "Colonial Revival" of the day.

(A smaller Town Hall, with handsome Greek pillars and closer to the road, was built on a part of the site in 1844 - a busy year on the set side

of the Common! It is the building shown in the 1858 sketch. It burned after fifty years of service, and it was recognized that larger as well as new quarters were needed.)

Blanchard Avenue

Blanchard Avenue, between the now "old" Town Hall and the library, leads to a small subdivision established by Fanny Blanchard (then living in the old Ruggles/Parker mansion) about 1912.

Billerica Public Library 1980

The Billerica Public Library (1979) occupies two lots. On the northern stood the "mansion house" of Rev. Samuel Ruggles, Billerica's second minister, probably framed about 1715 but substantially remodeled about 1790 for Stephen Parker and his bride (presumably by Reuben Duren, her father). It was moved to 5 River Street in 1973 and can be seen there alter. On the southern was a mid-nineteenth century house attributed to Charles Henry Parker, moved to Nuttings Lake in 1973.

Concord Road

29 Concord Rd: First Baptist Church Billerica Grange St. Theresa's Parish/Apartments

Next down Concord Road is the First Baptist Church, erected 1830 on "Holy Hill" at The Corner, and moved by forty pair of oxen to its present side south of the library in 1844. Its original façade and broad fenestration were replaced after 1853 by a façade with single entrance, a memorial window to Deacon Edward Spaulding above, and narrow fenestration throughout.

In the late nineteenth century, the church was disbanded and absorbed into the Baptist Church at North Billerica; the building was taken over by the Billerica Grange. In 19xx, acquired by the Archdiocese as the first home of Saint Theresa's Church. After construction of the present Saint Theresa's on Boston Road, used as a Parish Hall until 198x. Now

remodeled into “light house-keeping” apartments, with still another fenestration.¹

Pages Court

Ann Parker, resident in the old Ruggles/Parker house, had subdivided “her Whitman land” into a dozen small lots; Page’s Court is the right of way through them. The Baptist Church purchased the first lot for its building; several others were purchased by adherents to the church.

5 Pages Court: When Benjamin F. Gilbert bought the lot in 1849, it was “with buildings”. Gilbert was still there in 1853 and 1875.

6 Pages Court: Built on 1.5 lots. Benjamin Knight, minister of the church in 1844, bought the full lot, but soon sold to John Brown. Brown acquired the adjacent half-lot and presumably built the house. His widow was there in 1853 and, probably, as “Mrs. Fisher” in 1875. Her daughter sold to Charles H. Shedd in 1878.

Concord Road

33 Concord Road: An older house in the open space just south had been Dr. Timothy Danforth, town moderator throughout the Revolution and, later, Rev. Nathaniel Whitman during his pastorate in Billerica. Thus, when Ann Parker divided her “Whitman lots”, she was dividing land adjacent to that of her former pastor.

George Bacon bought the Danforth property in 1836 and probably moved to the center then. He added the front lot south of Page’s Court in 1844. The present house sits astride the boundary and was therefore built after 1845; tradition says that Edward Mansfield was the builder. It is a fine example of the entirely new house plan introduced during the Greek Revival, with entrance on the gable end, facing the street, and stair hall on the north side of the house; the recessed doorway is characteristic of ca.

¹ (What a busy year was 1844 along the west side of the Common! We should not forget that “The Corner”, where stages from both Boston and Salem converged to cross the Middle Bridge over the Concord, and “The Center” were in active competition for the “centership” between 1790 and 1840. Removal of the Baptist Church to the Center is clear record that the Corner had lost.)

1845-1850. It is not clear that Bacon ever lived in the new house, for he bought another place on Andover Road in 1846.

Bacon sold in 1849 to George H. Whitman (H.C. 1827; no connection to Rev. Whitman). He retired early from a successful law practice in Boston and came to Billerica, it is said, because of an old friendship with Dr. Zadock Howe. After his death, his only child and daughter remained until her death. For several years thereafter, the home of W. Harry Smith, an artist some of whose etchings still grace occasional Billerica homes. More recently, the rectory of Saint Theresa’s Parish.

39 Concord Road: Built in 1842 for William Mann (George Bacon’s brother-in-law), who sold a large farm on Lexington Road and “moved to the Center”. A good example of the more conservative Greek Revival house, based on a traditional house plan, with entrance on the broad side, but embellished by a strong cornice and pedimented gable.

In 1875, attributed to Rev. C. W. Fletcher, Baptist minister 1869-1875. In 1889, William Whiting, descendent of Billerica’s first minister, who had lived many years in Merrimac. Whiting’s daughter married—Staley of the Staley School of Oratory in Boston (whose most famous student was James Michael Curley). After William’s death, his widow and then the Staley’s lived on (he commuted to Boston by the street-car passing in front of the house).

38 Concord Road: (across the street; careful if you cross here): The house is on the “house-lot” of Daniel Shed (1658) and was adopted by the Shedd Family Association about 1910 as their ancestral home-stead. The gambrel-roofed ell may contain the gutted remnants of an early house (18th cent.?), facing south, but the front portion of the house is a full-sized addition facing the street.. Its door-way is reminiscent of that on the Clara E. Sexton Memorial to the north, but the interior plan is clearly nineteenth century.

Bought in 1869 by Samuel Sage of Bedford, surveyor (whose Bedford house has been the source of recent discussion here), and occupied until 192x by his widow, descendent of an old Billerica family. She left some handsome furniture and a fine collection of china to the Historical Society.

36 Concord Road: The Clara E. Sexton Memorial, home of the Billerica Historical Society

This house-lot was sold to Jacob Danforth, blacksmith, in 1729, "with buildings", but the frame suggests that Danforth built his own house, originally a salt-box. Jacob died in 1754; his son David sold to Rev. Henry Cumings, fourth pastor of the First Parish Church (1763-1823). (Dr. Timothy Danforth, the other son, kept his half of the farmstead across the street). We assume that Cumings added the handsome doorway. Cumings' pastorate was long and also distinguished. He was a vigorous and articulate leader in the Revolutionary years. At the end of his life, although unquestionably Trinitarian himself, he gracefully acknowledged the overriding importance of individual conscience as his parish embraced the Unitarian heresy.

Occupied during the nineteenth century by a succession of doctors, one of who added the small office on the north side, another of whom boarded insane persons. After 1879 returned to use as a private residence. William Sexton (whose wife bequeathed their home to the Billerica Historical Society in 1936), like Jacob Danforth, was a blacksmith. Full circle!

30 and 32 Concord Road: This unmatched pair of houses, ca. 1840, is not completely documented. That to the north was built athwart the access road to John Parker's tanning vats along Blanchard Brook and records the final abandonment of a family business carried on for about a century. It is a rare (for Billerica) example of five bays with central entrance in the gable end. That to the south is a more common style for cottages of the period. It may have been built for John Baldwin, Jr.

Cumings Street

8 Cumings Street: The site of one of Reuben Duren's square Federals (the Federal carriage house survives on the north side). During the early nineteenth century, occupied by a series of young lawyers when they first came to town, later on a succession of ministers and prominent members (including George Bacon) of the First Baptist Church. Later, Fanny Blanchard, during whose tenure it burned. She presumably built the turn-of-the-century replacement.

Reuben Duren was also developing the Chandler land south of the Common, while supervising construction of the church. He sold a piece in September 1797, with the Rev. Chandler's old house, and by Christmas was ready to sell "my dwelling house and shop" next to it. These fronted on

Boston Road, but the Chandler land ran through to Concord Road. By October 1799, Duren had another house ready to sell to William Crosby, here at the corner of Concord Road and Cumings Street. Only the hip-roofed carriage house survives.

William Crosby was a Billerica native, from a farm at the corner of Lexington and Manning Roads. In 1789, at the age of nineteen, he kept "the grammar school in the center of town, the very school which my old master (Jonathan) Kidder had kept so long and worthily. It was the year that General Washington.... Passed through Billerica and I had the honor and pleasure of parading my pupils in a row and at their head of making obeisance to him as he passed by my schoolhouse. He made no stop in Billerica...." Crosby later read for the law in Amherst, N.H., "but at the time I settled in Billerica my clothing hardly amounted to decency, I had not a cent in my pocket, and I was several hundred dollars in debt. But I found a friend in Mr. James Albert, a trader of the place in whose family I boarded. By the fall of 1801, I paid off my debts, was decently clothed, had a decent library, was the owner of a horse, also a lot and a house which I sold for about \$1300." (to Joseph Locke, q.v. later) "I had numerous friends and I am satisfied that there was no popular gift within the means of the town which would not have been in my reach within a few years". Crosby moved on to Belfast, Me., where he became an eminent jurist.

x Cumings Street: 1858, the house and shop of Jackson Wright, wheelright.

1-3 Cumings Street: John Parker, tanner, came from Bradford about 1745 and set up his vats farther south along Blanchard Brook. He married Abigail Kidder, daughter of a prominent Billerica family, in 1751 and built their house here. They established a family both prosperous and prominent in Billerica until the second quarter of this century.

Abigail died in 1777. Their eldest son John Married in 1778; he and his wife probably "took over" the household management. His brother, Stephen, was established in the "Ruggles mansion" by 1790, when he married Reuben Duren's daughter.

Abigail's brother, Lieut. Solomon Kidder, heir to the Kidder homestead on River Street, died Nov. 20, 1776 at White Plains, N.Y., leaving a young widow and four small children. She died soon, and the children were raised by relatives in her native town of Haverhill. About 1812, Stephen Parker (John's second son), bought out the Kidder heirs and returned to his mother's ancestral homestead. John, the eldest son, took over the "Ruggles Farm", and the old house on Cumings Street was sold to Francis Richardson.

Frederick Dickinson, a nephew of Emily, came from Amherst to Billerica in 1837 to teach school. He married Francis Richardson's daughter Mary L. in 1846 and eventually inherited the old house. Their son, Edward Fowler Dickinson, is said to have moved the old house south (where it formed the core which grew to be Martin's Block, only recently burned) and to have replaced it with the present house (built as a two-family) about the turn of the century.

Boston Road

Out tour continues across Boston Road, a difficult crossing at the best of times. I hope for facilitation by the local police, and I wish you luck!

Commons Plaza

The new Commons Plaza occupies a venerable site. Originally, East Street was planned to run eastward as far as the eye can see, along the headwaters of Blanchard Brook; Golden More's house site was probably on the north side. East Street was soon abandoned in favor of the present Andover Road. Joshua Abbott of Andover took over the house site about 1710, and his son Oliver, retailer, was there in 1775/6. The land by then extended both north to Andover Road and, by accretion, south an even larger distance (the land south of Blanchard Brook was taken up by Oliver's brother David).

Oliver's daughter Dorcas married Jonathan Bowers of Chelmsford. About 1795, they built the house and store next on our list and Oliver sold a piece at the corner of Andover Road to Ephraim Kidder (who married Dorcas' younger sister the next year). Oliver himself died in 196, both his widow and Jonathan Bower died in 1804. Dorcas carried on for a bit, but sold out after 1812 and moved to Charlestown with her teenage son.

The Abbott property changed hands several times in the nineteenth century. Paul Hill bought twelve acres with buildings in 1873. Paul Hill was a native son who had followed Horace Mann's advice and been very successful in railroad construction. When he retired to Billerica, he replaced the extant house with a high style Second Empire house, the most striking of five built in Billerica during a brief period of time. In his day, the place was known as "The Walnuts" because of two tremendous trees in the yard (it was also a place where walnuts propagated naturally, not common in this area).

After Hill's death, his family moved to Lowell and the place was bought by Sidney Bull of Carlisle (1896). He had been a successful merchant there, and he built a "Central Block" (two stores with apartments

over) north of "The Walnuts". For the next 90 years, the Bulls and their daughter, Mrs. Anson P. Stone, maintained a showplace on the southeast corner of the Common.

But all good things come to an end, and the place was finally sold. On a fine July day in 1987, "The Walnuts" lumbered about a mile north along Boston Road to a new site; the Central Block was demolished. Commons Plaza is taking their place amidst much discussion, not the least of which revolves around traffic and pedestrian circulation.

432 Boston Road: Oliver Abbott's daughter Dorcas and son-in-law Jonathan Bowers presumably built the square Federal "house-and-store" still standing east of the Common; certainly the widow Dorcas and her son sold it to George Bruce in 1812. Jonathan was the first postmaster in Billerica (1797), and the building housed the post-office for most of the next 120 years. It is the commercial building longest in service on the Common.

(Bruce was succeeded by the Baldwin brothers, Colonel John and Henry; Henry and, after 1846, his widow, lived in the store. After her death in 1876, it was taken over by Jasper F. Bruce (no connection to George). After his widow's death in 1926, it was taken over by A. Warren Stearns. It was for a time home of the Billerica Trust Company, a local bank which opened its doors in August of 1929 and somehow managed to keep them open until bought out by the Middlesex Bank in 1945.)

The Grand Rental Station, next north, was built in 1928 to house a Ford agency.

The rather long block from here to the corner of Andover Road is an amalgamation of two prior buildings, but the site has had a long history.

Oliver Abbott sold a half-acre at the corner of "Sheldon's Lane" to Ephraim Kidder in 1795. There was a building on it (the first I know of built on spec) when Kidder resold it to James Abbott in 1797,² presumably the square Federal shown in Barber's sketch. Abbott seems to have tried unsuccessfully to attract a commercial buyer, but it was first occupied by Dr. William Wilkins (1799-1809), Dr. Joseph Foster (1809-1819), and the latter's widow for a time thereafter. William Richardson had a hotel by

² Kidder moved on to The Corner and further speculation there. That is still another tale, but we should hold in mind that for the next 40 years, The Corner and The Center were in conscious competition for the "centership" of Billerica.

1815, and it remained a hotel (note sign-board in Barber's sketch) until it burned in 1876. Only an additional front porch shows in the 1858 sketch of Billerica, when Fletcher was proprietor.³

Dedication of the new meeting-house in 1798 provided, for the first time, a building used primarily for religious purposes. The third meeting-house was moved from its original site on the Common to the east side of Boston Road, set on land given by James Abbott between his new building and Jonathan Bowers house-and-store, and remodeled for primarily secular use.

This was the First "Town Hall", the first tangible record of the separation of Church and State guaranteed by the new Constitution.

The building served as secular meeting and also, apparently, housed the Center grammar school until 1844, when the new Town Hall was built on the west side of the Common. We don't have a continuous history thereafter. After the Civil War it was the GAR Hall; it seems to have disappeared by 1889.

In the meantime, the hotel burned in 1876 was replaced by a flamboyant Victorian structure occupied in 1880 by Moses C. Mitchell, who had moved his successful boys' school from Edgartown to Billerica. Mitchell was also plagued by fire, and by 1889 had moved to a site outside the village on Concord Road. The house which finally replaced the school, less flamboyant, became the residence of Dr. A. C. Lane and, eventually, an Allen family. They built a store to the south (recognizable as the two-story section of the present block).

In 1926, the house on the corner was moved back, and Economy Stores built the north end of the present block. The final amalgamation was achieved after World War II under the aegis of one Cohen, who also built the cinder-block separate addition around the corner on Andover Road.

By now, if still walking, we have reached the corner of Andover Road and, if you wish, can go a little way up to see the Orthodox Church and

some of its neighbors. First, however, let's look across to 414 Boston Road, the Brown/Howe/Faulkner house.

414 Boston Road

Capt. Solomon Pollard sold the store at the (north) corner of Boston Road and Sheldon's Lane, lately run by Bradley Bowers, to James Abbott of Andover, N.H. in 1793. Abbott was a mover and shaker; selectman in 1797, representative in 1803, in the hands of his creditors by 1810 and disappeared by 1815. After changing hands several times, the store was moved away in 1833 to make room for Dr. Thaddeus Brown's new house.

"Dr. (Zadock) Howe lived at the tavern until (this house was built). Dr. Howe's partner, young Thaddeus Brown, had married a rich man's daughter and built the house with his father-in-law's money. Dr. Howe lived there with Dr. Brown until Dr. Brown died, leaving a widow and two children. The widow sold the home to Dr. Howe and moved away. Col. Baldwin moved in with his family and boarded Dr. Howe until the Doctor died."⁴

Luther Faulkner, son of the Francis Faulkner who established the Faulkner Mills in North Billerica, had established his own mill in Lowell, but maintained his residence here in Billerica from 1852 until his death in 1904, the only one of the mill-owners to "move to the Center". He added the cupola, the porch on the south side and, after 1873, the bay-windows on the west. His son, Richard, born in 1851, succeeded to the superintendency of the Faulkner Mills in North Billerica, but never married. When he decided to retire, about 1912, the homestead was sold in pieces. The house became the home of Harry Waitz, the Bedford tailor, and is still owned by his children. T. F. Lyons built the post-office and store to the north of the house (see below). The barn on the east (Andover Road) side was bought by Morey's Coal and Grain Store and enlarged by the addition of an old carriage shed from the old hotel across the street. The present brick-veneered building is but a shadow of its former self.

If you care to take the turn up Andover Road, we shall walk down on the south side, return on the north.

³ Wilkins apparently took on apprentices, one of them Nathaniel Peabody. Mrs. Peabody taught a female (?) school while in Billerica; the Historical Society has a silk needlepoint "wrought" there. Elizabeth, eldest of the "Peabody sisters of Salem" made famous by Elizabeth Bowen, is one of Billerica's illustrious daughters. Wilkins settled in Salem after finishing his apprenticeship here.

⁴ From reminiscences of Luther Faulkner, who bought the house from the Howe trustees.

Andover Road

1A Andover Road: is Cohen's post-WWII extension of the long block. The "Professional Building" next beyond replaced the Allen house, moved to the back of the lot, about 1960.

The next house was built about 1885 for Edwin N. Ray, who had married a Faulkner daughter. They did not stay in Billerica long.

The telephone company building was built in stages. The first portion, ca. 1930, housed the first dial system in the Lowell area and replaced the old switch-board in the Baldwin/Lyons house diagonally across the street. One stage of growth eastward in the 1950's replaced the Greek Revival house to which William Gleason, first deacon of the Orthodox Church moved when he sold the College Farm in 1850.

13 Andover Road: Samuel Tucker House, ca. 1880.

Replaces an older house, built by John Wetherbee about 1815 and sold by his son to the Baldwin brothers in 1825; Colonel John Baldwin lived directly across the street (see below). When his heirs quitclaimed the Wetherbee place to his son Francis, in 1876, one would assume that the latter (m. in 1839) had been in residence some time. But Francis died in 1878, the heirs quit-claimed in turn to his daughter Annie, who had married Samuel Tucker, and her brother Henry, who had just come of age. We assume that Annie and her brother replaced the older house by the present two-family, before 1889 when its present outlines are shown clearly on a map of the center.

"Professor" Samuel Tucker came to Billerica in 1868, as principal of the Howe School.

15 Andover Road: Herbert and Mary Jacobs House, ca. 1910.

Mary F. (Morey) Jacobs was a grand-daughter of Charles Henry and Kate (Baldwin) Parker and great-grand-daughter of Colonel John Baldwin. When she and her husband moved into their new house, she was returning to home territory.

Access Road Commons Plaza: replaces the Gilman Fletcher house, ca. 1840.

The Fletcher house was a two-story house, with center entrance in five bays on the gable end, an unusual style for Billerica. Fletcher was a butcher and for some time operated a slaughter house in the rear. But not long; social pressure encouraged him to move the slaughter to a new location at a greater distance from the village center.

The **Playground** beyond (Little League field in the rear) is in the yard of the former Pollard School, 1896, razed about 1980.

23 Andover Road: Thomas R. Shedd c1845

Thomas R. Shedd was a carpenter, cabinet-maker and, when needed, coffin-maker. He built this attractive Greek Revival cottage for himself; the porch colonade in Egyptian style is unique in Billerica.

25 Andover Road: George Bacon House c1845

George Bacon bought from John Eames in 1846, there was already a building on the lot. Interior features suggest that a one-story house was enlarged, perhaps by Bacon; its final form (originally with recessed door-way) is characteristic of the same period. Bacon was building another house built on Concord Road at the same time (33 Concord Road), which he sold. This seems to have been the house where he lived, until he bought the large Federal across from the Baptist Church in 1855. He sold to Mary L. Fox; the 1875 map and contemporaneous deeds of abutters refer to the "Fox parsonage", but a Reverend Fox has not been identified.

Rehabilitated within the last few years, and the recessed door-way replaced because the sills were badly rotted.

Now one can cross the street to the Sarah Sheldon Center house, 1741.

28 Andover Road: Sarah Sheldon Center House c1741

You must have admired it coming up the street (Sheldon's Lane). Samuel Sheldon, of the second generation in Billerica, extended his father's farm to both sides of Andover Road, but I think he still lived on the south side and that this house was built for his daughter, who married John Center in 1741. It is a well-preserved eighteenth century house, and on Sheldon's Lane was the house nearest to the Common occupied in Revolutionary days.

26 Andover Road: Simon and Mary Bagdigian, ca. 1960.

24 Andover Road: Oliver P. Greenwood, ca. 1915, enlargement of an older cottage of the late nineteenth century.

20 Andover Road: the "Sabbath Day House", 1765.

In the eighteenth century, there were two regular services in the First Parish Church on Sunday, morning and afternoon, both long (and the church had no heat). Regular attendance of the parishioners was

required, in foul as in fair. In 1765, several families from East Billerica bought land from David Osgood (then owner of Solomon Pollard's tavern) on which to build this small house for refuge and warmth Sunday noons, between services. After Osgood died, his widow moved into the house as house-keeper.

In 1818, when the original families no longer felt need of the house, one of the then Proprietors, Theophilus Manning, bought out the others. It was rented, among others, to the artist/inventor Rufus Porter and his family when they established a home base in Billerica. Ownership descended from Manning to a grand-daughter, who gave the house as a wedding present to her niece, Katharine Eastman (Tyler) Dale and the Rev. Dr. John Harold Dale, minister for 50 years of the Orthodox Church next door.

18 Andover Road: the Second Congregational Church (Trinitarian), 1830.

Organized in 1829 by twenty-five members, of whom only William Gleason (the first deacon) is listed as coming from First Parish Church. His wife, Sarah (Bacon) Gleason and five children are listed as "of Woburn", where they had been attending the first church, then in a state of active revival under a new, young minister, Edward Bennett. Martha Bowers had earlier asked for dismissal from First Parish, and was attending the Bedford church. Most of the others were residents of Billerica, or of Tewksbury near the Billerica line, but not affiliated with First Parish.

The original façade was typical for its time, with three great doors and broad fenestration throughout. It was refashioned later in the nineteenth century to its present form, with single center entrance and narrower windows (the Victorian trim looks like the handiwork of Gerritt Bennink).

16 Andover Road: Colonel John Baldwin, 1811.

Colonel Baldwin married Clarissa Parker in 1810 and, until his death in 1876, was one of the most influential men in Billerica. It is interesting that his house --- although abandoning the traditional central chimney, is a three-chimney modification of the traditional farmhouse with none of the ostentation of contemporaneous square Federals. Such seems to have been characteristic of the man himself.

The house has been home only to two families; two generations of Baldwin and, after, two generations of Lyons. Thomas F. Lyons, postmaster, took over in 1907; his daughter still lives there today. Before the advent of the dial system, the nerve-center of Billerica's

telephone system was a switchboard in the rear west room of this house.

12 Andover Road: This commercial building was built in 1973 as an addition to an 1892 house built for Joseph E. and Jessie (Underhill) Blodgett.

Their daughter finally sold in 1944 to a woman who set up a home business in hair-dressing. As patronage grew and she needed assistance, the house was zoned for neighborhood business. It was sold again in 1973; the new owner built the addition (as allowed by extant zoning), then took down the main house, and voila!

10 Andover Road: Blodgett homestead, 1799?

This miniature salt-box did not achieve its present form until after World War II, but it has been often remodeled and may have been an inadvertent restoration.

Solomon Pollard sold the land to Asa Duren, carpenter (one of Reuben Duren's brothers), in 1799; Asa sold to Andrews with building. After many other transfers, it was sold to Gilman Fletcher, who apparently lived there while his new house was a-building farther up the street. He then sold to Orvilliers Blodgett of Bedford, whose family held it for three generations. A grandson built the second house (12 Andover Road) on the lot.

Now we have reached the old Brown/Howe/Faulkner homestead again and can turn north at the corner of Boston Road.

Boston Road

406-412 Boston Road: The T. F. Lyons building, circa 1915 and twice enlarged, most recently in 1988. Thomas F. Lyons had long been postmaster (in the Jonathan Bowers building down the street) and, when the Faulkner place was for sale, bought this piece and built the original building for post-office, newsstand, and candy store, with an apartment above. In the days before mail delivery, this was the place one picked up his mail, newspaper, and, not incidentally, all the latest local news from others there on the same errands.

If time presses, you may wish to cross over here, at the traffic lights at River Street, and return to First Parish. I shall continue north a bit to see a few other old-timers.

to provide ample room for a new street-car line, Dudley Foster stood in from of the tree saying they would have to cut him down first before they touched the tree itself. Dudley was influential when the Historical Society placed a marker on the tree commemorating Washington's passage through Billerica in 1789, hence the "Washington Oak". Its branches provide the background to a map of the town in the Town Flag, adopted about 1975.

377 Boston Road: ca. 1838 for Dudley Foster, probably by Edward Mansfield, enlarged ca. 1915 by addition of a bay north of the doorway and stair hall.
Dudley Foster as important in town affairs: "town clerk and treasurer for 25 years, trustee of the Howe School from the beginning, and treasurer" (Hazen 1883), etc., etc. After his father's death in 1857, he moved back into the house next north and is more closely associated with that location.

381 Boston Road: (corner of River Street) Joseph Locke, 1811.
Joseph Locke sold to Joel Richardson, a Billerica boy who had established himself as a gunsmith in Boston and retired to his native town. His sister had married their cousin, Francis Richardson, and lived at the other end of the common. Eleanor (Richardson) Bennett was another sister. One of his daughters married John Corbin Hutchins and lived in Philadelphia, but maintained an active interest in Billerica. The Hutchin's gave the triangle between the two branches of River Street to the town; the Historical Society has a copy of his flowing response to a resolution of thanks voted in town meeting, specifically mentioning the magnificent trees he had planted years before. The Hutchin's also took an active interest in the newly established Bennett Public Library. But they sold the house in 1875 to Joel H. Dix, another native son and successful business man in Chicago. He presumably added the cupola, dormer windows, and front veranda which once embellished the house. The Dix family sold in 1885 to George E. Stearns, who operated a hotel there for about ten years (the last hotel in Billerica?) before moving on to the Charlesgate in Boston. His son, A. Warren Stearns, M.D., established his residence there after World War I and took off the cupola, two of the four dormers, and the front veranda.

Now you are back to River Street and, with a little care, can take advantage of the traffic signals to cross Boston Road if you wish. We can look

down River Street while we are here, but stop just a moment to notice two "monuments" moved to the triangular green at its beginning.

First, the **Kohlrausch watering trough**.

Charles H. Kohlrausch, Jr. succeeded his father as chief chemist in the Talbot Mills in North Billerica and a highly respected town officer, for many years moderator of the Town Meeting. After his death in 1912, his widow gave the Kohlrausch Playground in North Billerica to the Town, but she also wanted something in the Center. The watering-trough is this memorial; the lion's head font is by Daniel Chester French. Originally (and more functionally) it stood at the northern apex of the Common between Boston and Concord Roads. It was moved to its present position in 1926 as part of an attempt to clear a larger arena for the automobile.

Then the old **Town Pump**

The old Town Pump once stood in the highway at the entrance to Andover Road (see 1858 sketch). The watering-trough and shed were added by the Village Improvement Association in 1881 and, after the introduction of the automobile, were a serious challenge both to motorists and to traffic engineers trying to help them get through town. First moved back toward Andover Road in 1926, the shed and watering-trough were moved to this position during the last rearrangement of traffic ("Topics Program") in 198x.

1 Concord Road: William Bowers M.D.(1804? – so it is said; I suspect earlier).

The handsome Federal brick-ender on the corner of Concord Road and River Street was built for Dr. William Bowers, H. C. 1769. He had acquired an old house on the site in 1791. We don't know that its replacement is Reuben Duren's finest work, but the massive corner quoins reflect those on First Parish Church and the remodeled Ruggles/Parker mansion, both of which were his. The especially fine front doorway is not original to the building, but was installed about 1920 by Rev. and Mrs. George M. Ward; its provenance is not known. In hurricane (?) Gloria, a large tree toppled on and broke the southwest corner post of the house, with devastating results. The present owners have recently completed a difficult and magnificent job of restoration.

Dr. Bowers died in 1820, his widow in 1834; three unmarried daughters ("the Bowers girls") maintained the house until the death of the last in 1871. A few families in town still have heirlooms bought at

404 Boston Road: Built for Marshall Preston, 1827.

Marshall Preston came to Billerica about 1820 as a young lawyer and married Maria, daughter of Col. John Parker, Jr., in 1824. He bought the north half of the old store lot in 1827; his house is good Greek Revival (the porch on the south side is later. Only a small office down by the road is barely discernable in the original Barber sketch). Town clerk, post-master, and influential citizen until his removal to Lexington in 1849; assistant clerk of the Courts in Middlesex County until 1863.

From about 1885 to about 1965, parsonage of the First Parish Church in Billerica.

400 Boston Road: Built (on spec?) for John O. Richardson, 1879.

He had reactivated a saw mill on Content Brook in East Billerica, which furnished materials to several houses in the Center during the '80's and '90's. Gerit Bennick was the master-builder. His distinctive window trim, on this and several others, has been sacrificed to vinyl siding; an example survives on the small barn. Later occupied for a time by Richardson's niece and her husband, Charles H. Eames, president of Lowell Textile Institute and active in Billerica affairs. Best remembered by present old-timers as the home of Orland S. Marshall, M.D., and his wife Stella, who came to Billerica about 1920 and stayed for a life-time of service.

398 Boston Road: Built (on spec?) for John O. Richardson, 1884.

Later occupied by his son, John A. Richardson, until his death about 1928. Long associated with the lumber yard at Bennett Hall Station (now Grossman's), which he opened in 1912, John A. Richardson was widely respected as citizen and "pillar of the community". Trustee of many private funds, including those of the Howe School. A later occupant of the house was attorney Marion D. Gould, Town Moderator ca. 1960 to 1970, when ill health forced her to seek retirement.

396 Boston Road: Site of Solomon Pollard's Tavern

The vacant lot beyond was the site of Solomon Pollard's tavern in Revolutionary times, possibly Jonathan Danforth, Jr.'s homestead of 1682, enlarged as a tavern in the eighteenth century. During Pollard's tenure, the selectmen held their meetings there (and fortified their discussions with cider); it must have been the nerve-center of the town. About 1812, bought by Icabod Everett, a gentleman and man of affairs

who returned it to use as a private residence; in later generations an active farm. Burned (arson) only several years ago.

250 Boston Road: The original Howe School, 1852.

Late in life, Dr. Zadock Howe, a bachelor all his life, bought this lot and started a little ornamental planting. His fellow townsmen thought that perhaps, after all these years, the good doctor had his eye on a prospective bride. But he was not talking. When he died in 1851, his will left the lot and the bulk of his estate to a Board of Trustees, directed to use their assets to establish a free public academy. This is the building they dedicated in 1852. It was twenty-five years before the Trustees found it necessary to charge a small tuition, but as the town continued to grow, the Town began to contribute to its support; eventually the academy was absorbed into the Town school system, long an elementary school and most recently as administration building.

The Howe School was the beginning of free education beyond grammar school in Billerica, culminating attempts through more than fifty years to establish a local academy. The Howe Trustees still provide supplementary assistance, but the program has grown far beyond even Dr. Howe's optimistic vision of the future.

We are now moving across the street, but don't cross here. Rather, return on this side to the corner of River Street, where traffic lights provide some assistance.

373 Boston Road: An 1896 enlargement of an older story-and-a-half house, the former "store" at the corner of Boston and Andover Roads.

"Cap'n Sam" Foster, cordwainer, came from Beverly to Billerica in 1800 with his father and several siblings. He bought a lot on River Street in 1800 and this lot next north of Joseph Locke in 1810, but may have lived on the farm on Allen Road for some time. In 1833 he bought the former "store" from the corner of Boston and Andover Roads and moved it to this site. It is the house associated with Cap'n Sam and, after his death, his son Dudley. After Dudley's death, his son John Howard, a successful merchant in Springfield, retired to Billerica and enlarged the house to its present form.

The "Washington Oak", a magnificent specimen older than the Town itself, stood by – partly in, you can still see the bulge in the curb – the road in from of this house until hurricane (?) Gloria. Tradition says that, when it was proposed to cut the tree down and widen the road

the final auction. Priscilla left her entire estate to the Baptist Church; Mary and Fanny established the Bowers Fund, still administered by the town for the benefit of the worthy poor. The house was bought by William Osborn, who had married Stephen Parker's daughter Clarissa (a second marriage for both). After her death, it passed to Frederick H. Parker and eventually to Rev. Minot Savage and, later, Rev. George M. Ward, both of whom it served as a summer home. After Mrs. Ward's death, it was purchased by the present owners, Dr. John and Eva Marshall. Full circle!

Here you may wish to take a short detour down River Street, far enough to see:

River Street

6 River Street: The once shingled house built, after her own design, for Kate (Baldwin) Parker about 1910, after her husband's death.

10 River Street: Built for Loring Bryant about 1880.

16 River Street: (visible at a short distance) "Brown house", owned by the Billerica Housing Authority and operated as a Drop-in Center by the Council on the Aging. Circa 1910, the last of the Parkers on the ancestral Kidder homestead replaced the old house with this new house.

13 River Street: (across the street) Circa 1845, built as a joint venture by Marshall Preston (q.v. later, 404 Boston Road) and Joel Richardson (q.v., 381 Boston Road). Possibly intended as a parsonage for the Universalist Church next door (q.v. 5 River Street)? Don't know!

5 River Street: The Ruggles/Parker mansion, originally framed for the Rev. Samuel Ruggles about 1715, remodeled about 1790 by Reuben Duren for his new son-in-law Stephen Parker, moved from its original site on the Common in 1973.

The hip roof, two story portico, and corner quoins are Reuben's (not that the pilasters on the portico don't quite match). Curiously, he did not take out the central chimney at that time; the "front hall" staircase was given a new trim, but it is still the cramped staircase of colonial times. Rather, Flanny Blanchard took out the old chimney; the present chimney was designed by Brian Woolfenden, last to occupy the house

on its original site. Fanny had also added an over-all coat of stucco, and a porte-corchere at the side.

This is the site upon which a secessionist group from First Parish built a Universalist Church in 1842. It is included, with some artistic license of position, in the 1858 sketch of the Center. The church was disbanded in 1868 (most of its members returned to the Unitarian First Parish), and the building was moved to North Billerica, where it served a new and growing Roman Catholic Church. It was replaced by "School No. 1" and, later, when the Pollard School was built on Andover Road, by Gardner Parker Hall, used as a meeting place by several fraternal organizations. The last-named building was burned in the Valentine's Day blizzard of 1940.

Concord Road

Now back to Concord Road and a final admiring inspection of the Bowers house as he head back toward First Parish Church. En route, we pass:

The Bennett Public Library

Rather late in life, Eleanor (Richardson) Bennett, widow of Joshua Bennett, offered to give the town a building and modest endowment for a public library, to be named for her late husband. Town meeting, in its wisdom, declined her generous offer. A small group of citizens, let by Mrs. Bennett's two sons-in-law, formed the Bennett Public Library Association for the sole purpose of receiving her gift and administering it usefully. William Osborn, gave his mother's strawberry patch as a site. The Victorian Gothic building which you see was dedicated in 1880, and for nearly a hundred years housed Billerica's principal library resources.

The building had been modestly expanded to the rear, but had reached its limit on the site. After some years of planning and fund-raising, the new library farther south was dedicated by the Town in 1979 and placed in charge of a Town Board of Trustees. The Bennett Public Library Association continues to supplement the Town's program by sponsoring some of the variety of cultural activities which has become associated with libraries in the present century.

Back to First Parish Church. Full circle!