

Middleborough history

Middleborough was a well-established Native American settlement abandoned due to disease before the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth in 1620. The Pilgrims were attracted to the water power on the Nemasket River and the spring fish spawn in Lake Assawompsett. Nearly 50 years of peace followed before the Pilgrims began persecuting Native American tribes. The whole town was burned down in King Philip's War and the Pilgrims retreated to Plymouth, leaving little trace of the settlement.

In 1679 the Pilgrims rebuilt the town, recognizing its important location as the intersection of colonial roads between Plymouth and New Bedford, and between Taunton and Wareham on Buzzard's Bay. They started damming the river to power new local industries. The first grist mill ground grain that otherwise had to be carried to Plymouth and back on horseback. Over the next decades they added saw mills, cotton mills, forges and furnaces for iron and shovel works, and factories for straw hats.

Middleborough dominated the New England cranberry industry. In 1816 a Cape Cod grower discovered that blowing sand in and around cranberry bogs increased the size and taste of the berry. Southeastern Massachusetts growers soon had 675 acres of bogs in place. They spent decades figuring out how to harvest and sell the berries without spoilage. In 1907, growers in Wisconsin, New Jersey and Massachusetts established nationwide standards for growing and selling berries, including canning berries. The headquarters for Ocean Spray Cranberries was established in Middleborough and is still there.

Historic Residential Walk / South Main St.

- 1 Middleborough Town Hall (1873), designed by architect Solomon K. Eaton, is a large Italianate building with a low hip roof capped by a tall cupola. The upper stories have double-height windows for a large 2-story assembly hall. Designed to impress by its exceptionally tall tower, it is an indicator of civic pride and small-town ambition.
- 2 #51 / Home of Zachariah Eddy (1850), one of area's the most prominent lawyers, is in a Greek Revival style with 19th c. glazed entrance porch.
- 3 #55 / Home of Sidney Tucker (1840), postmaster, is a Greek Revival cottage with entrance framed by sidelights and pilaster strips.
- 4 #61 / Home of William Andrews (1850), a shoe merchant, is an ell shape with a full-width porch and a connected barn.
- 5 #77 / House (1771) built by Silas Wood, red with a gambrel roof, is one of the oldest buildings in town. Roof timbers, paneling and bricks may date to 1710.
- 6 #83 / Home of James Coombs (1870), editor of the *Middleboro Gazette*, has a 20th c. porch with Tuscan columns and a low balustrade and a cupola.
- 7 #85 / Home of Augustine Sparrow (1897), proprietor of a men's clothing store, is a Queen Anne style, with clapboards on the first story, shingles on the second and a low, spreading wraparound porch with pediments at the entrances.

8 #87 / Home of Philo Pickens (1866), a carriage-maker, has an unusual concave mansard roof with dramatic dormer windows and a sweeping wraparound porch with Tuscan columns.

9 #93 / Home of Judge Ebenezer Pickens (ca. 1812), a straw hat manufacturer, is of a Federal style with a center entrance flanked by sidelights and a full-width Doric porch added in 1832.

10 #107 / Home of Elwyn Lynde (1916), a Middleborough banker, is a fine Colonial Revival building with a pedimented entrance and an elliptical fanlight.

Cross the street to follow tour back toward Town Hall.

11 #120 / Home of Captain John Soule (1855), a sailor, is an Italianate villa with a low hip roof and a strutwork front porch.

12 #112 / Home of William Wood (1800) and later Judge Dennis Sullivan, is a concave mansard roof house with a Tuscan-columned porch and hooded dormers.

13 #108 / Home of Albert Alden house (1860), a manufacturer of women's hats and bonnets, is a florid Italianate house with an exuberant strutwork porch and a bracketed cupola at the crest of the roof.

14 #104 / Home of John Miller (1895), a textile magnate, is a Queen Anne Shingle style having a bulbous column porch, a 2nd-story balcony and a side turret.

15 #100 / Home of Andrew Pickens (1840), a straw hat manufacturer, is in Greek Revival style, with a wraparound Doric porch and 4 rounded windows in the gable.

16 #94 / Home of Judge Ebenezer Pickens (1852), now the Middleborough Counseling Center, a Greek Revival design with a wraparound strutwork porch, built when the judge gave his house at #93 S. Main St. to his son.

17 #76 / Home of Judge Nathan Washburn (1900), who served in the Fourth District Court, is a picturesque Queen Anne style with a full-width porch and a complex high cross-gable roof.

18 #64 / Home of George & Julia (Miller) Copeland (1888) has a high hip roof. Julia was a philanthropist who endowed the public library. George was a director at the Middleboro National Bank.

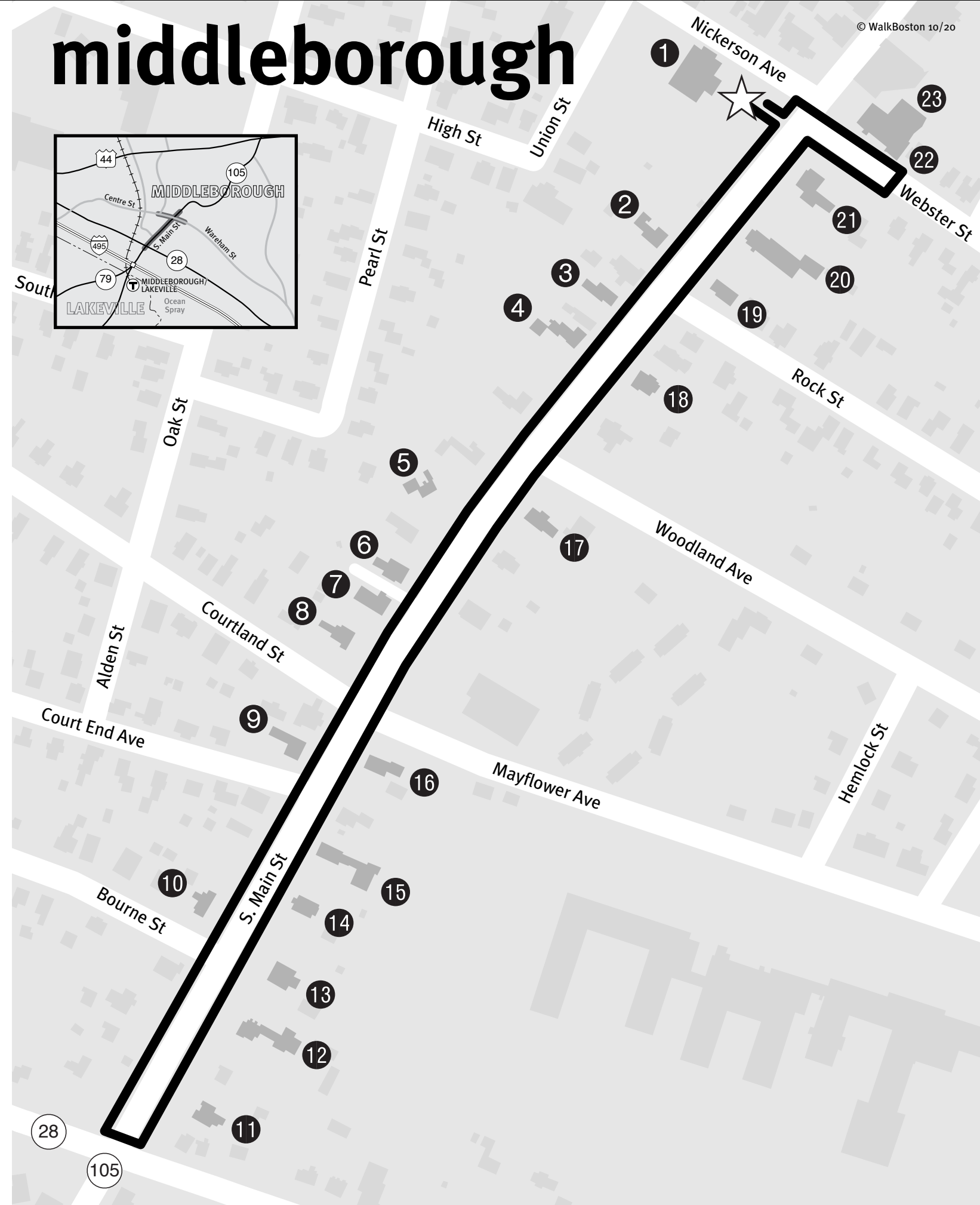
19 #50 / Home of James Cole (1840), a livery stable owner, real estate salesman and an auctioneer, is a Greek Revival building with a picket fence.

20 #46 / Home of Horatio Barrows (1880), partner of the shoe firm Leonard & Barrows, now the Masonic Lodge, became Colonial Revival in style when a 2-story porch and an entry on the driveway side were added in 1908.

21 #32 / Home of Philander Washburn (1840), a shovel manufacturer (now the Gas & Electric Co.), with a temple front, Greek Key capitals on pilasters and a side entrance.

22 Central Congregational Church (1848), in Greek Revival style with an Ionic projecting porch, a 3-stage tower above the porch and a narrow spire above.

23 Central Congregational Chapel, behind the church on Webster Street, a 1-story wood frame building with a Doric portico and 20th c. storefront, moved here from 30 S. Main St.



Historic Commercial District / Centre Street

A Unitarian Universalist Church (1891), a picturesque building with a fieldstone foundation and pediment entrance.

B #17-21 S. Main St. / Thatcher Homestead (1831) was a family residence until 1900 when the building was transformed by adding storefronts and upper-story apartments.

C #10 / Savings Bank Building (1895), now Town Hall Annex, built at the height of local prosperity in Romanesque style when other commercial properties were wood-frame buildings or conversions of dwelling houses.

Centre St. and Main St. intersection, a.k.a. Four Corners, is the heart of the commercial district. Turn left on Centre St.

D #38 / Art Gallery Building (ca. 1875), a wood-frame Italianate building with a Neo-Victorian storefront.

E #90 / United States Post Office (1931), a monumental, impressively sited, and well preserved Georgian Revival style of Flemish-bond brick and white marble. The lobby is largely intact, with brown-and-red tile marble-bordered floor, Vermont marble wainscot, and original service windows and post boxes.

F #120 / Church of Our Saviour (1897), rugged and severe, modeled on early English country churches. Built of random-course orange and gray Quincy granite, in a cruciform style with a massive squat tower over the crossing of the nave.

G #155 / School Street School (1850), monumental Greek Revival/Italianate building with mid-1900s storefronts, was moved here and converted to commercial use to make way for a new school building.

H #145 / Home of Otis Briggs (1875), a horse dealer and stable keeper, is Italianate with a fine bracketed porch.

I #133 / Pasztor & Klar Bake Shop (1911), later Shaw's furniture and appliances which sold the first TVs. Now the Burt Wood School of Performing Arts and Alley Theater.

J #111 / Glidden Block (1889), a handsome Richardsonian Romanesque building with modern storefronts below the original facade.

Return to Main St.

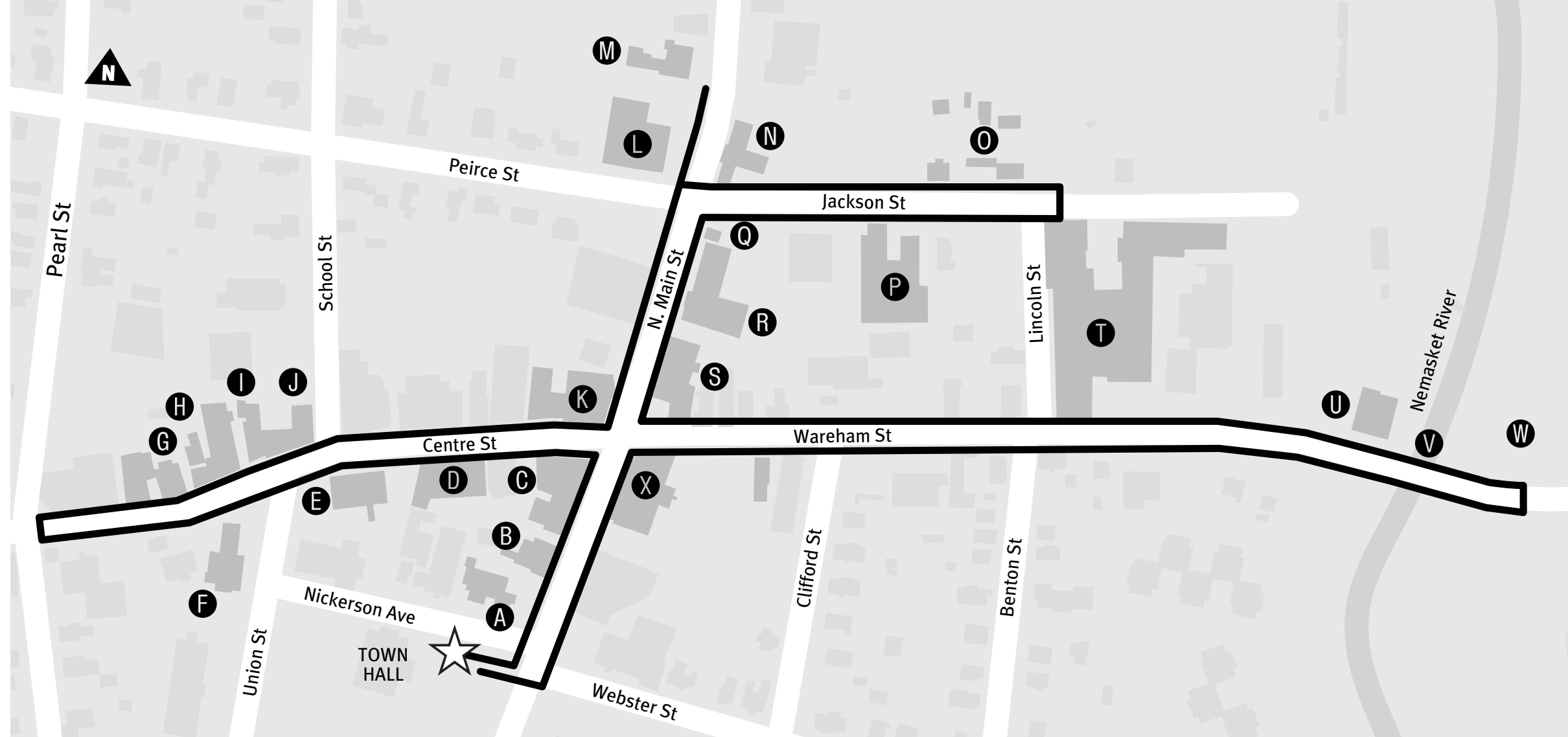
K #11 / Peirce Building (1900), a Neo-Classical, yellow brick structure, notable for the 3rd-floor double-height arched palladian windows and the stone face on the 2nd floor.

L #102 / Middleborough Public Library (1903), an impressive Roman brick-and-stone building, has a modern rear addition and an entrance on Peirce Street. The interior has intimate Colonial Revival detailing that is beautifully preserved.

M #132 / Home of Colonel Peter H. Peirce (ca. 1815), the 3-story Federal style house has an original center entrance, with sidelights and fanlight and an added wraparound porch.

N #99 / Colonel Peter Peirce Store (1835), now the police station, is a Greek Revival formal temple-front with Georgian Revival wings. The stand-alone columns are unusual in a general store.

At Jackson St. turn left.



O 18-20 Jackson St. / Middleborough Historical Museum, these 7 buildings house the Historical Association's collections. The preservation efforts of the campus began when two original houses for mill workers were threatened with demolition in 1960.

- Peirce Mill Houses I and II (1820): Two nearly identical short buildings painted red have two doors on the facade. The houses (now containing exhibits) were occupied by two families who worked at Colonel Peirce's cotton and shovel mills nearby.

- Sproat Tavern Outhouse (1700): This relocated 5-seat outhouse was part of the original Tavern on Plymouth St., where large crowds gathered.

- Blacksmith Shop: A reproduction, houses a forge for iron-working and the Buckman blacksmithing collection.

- Judge Wilkes Wood Law Office (1796): A small building moved here from S. Main St. after serving as Wood's law quarters.

- Whistle House (ca. late 1800): Moved from Vine St., this clapboard building with a short tower housed the whistle that alerted firemen out of earshot of the Town Hall alarm.

- Carriage Shed: A reproduction with three arched openings was built to house collections of vehicles and agricultural tools.

P #17/ Robbins Museum of Archaeology (ca. 1900) displays Native American artifacts, an ancient timeline and model village, dolls, portraits and a handcrafted mishoon (dugout canoe).

Return to N. Main St. Turn left.

Q #75 / Robinson Law Office (ca. 1787), one of the oldest houses in town, a brick Greek Revival building with a center entrance flanked by large display windows.

R #49 / Federal Revival building (1922) has an elaborate porch flanked by bow windows and a palladian window on the 2nd floor.

S #17 / Wells-Murdock-Jones building (1850), a Classical Revival brick-frame with mid-20th-c. storefronts, paired 2nd-story windows and a 3rd-floor Palladian window.

Turn left on Wareham St.

T #25 / Middleboro, Wareham & Buzzards Bay Railway built this Car Barn (1900), with a stucco facade. Behind the front office was a large industrial space used for street railway car maintenance. In 1906 Carlton Maxim used the property to manufacture motorized fire trucks that were shipped all around the country.

U #37 / Middleborough Gas and Electric Company (1885) housed Middleborough's first private electric source, powered by a water wheel in the Nemasket River.

V Nemasket River Bridge, built to cross the river and serve as a pier for sidewheeler boats to take passengers for clambakes or an afternoon of fun and relaxation on Lake Assawompsett.

W Herring Run at Thomas Park, just beyond the bridge, is the

concrete watery bypass that lets fish jump upriver as they migrate to spawn in Lake Assawompsett.

Return to S. Main St.

X #4-10 / American Hall (1837), remodeled many times, had a large hall on the upper story, with retail stores below. The hall was once used for large gatherings, then became a movie theater in 1912.

Text: Bob Sloane Design: ninagarfinkle.com

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