

The Melrose Historical Society invites you to become a member. Its mission is to preserve and celebrate the history of Melrose, and to promote a better understanding of local history in general. The Society holds three public meetings each year with presentations on a wide variety of topics. For further information, send a post card to:

Melrose Historical Society, Inc.
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Melrose Walks

MAIN STREET

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--- AREA COVERED BY WALK

See inside for detailed view

Main Street: Overview

Main Street is the business and civic center of Melrose. Here we find City Hall, the Central Fire station, Memorial Hall, the Baptist and Methodist Churches, the YMCA, and four blocks of businesses, banks, restaurants.

The present street was laid out in 1806. As far back as the mid 17th century, there had been a road from Charlestown to Reading. It twisted and turned following the topography of the land and avoiding the marshy land south of Ell Pond. This was adequate in colonial times when much of present day Melrose consisted of a dozen farms. When it rained and the land south of Ell Pond flooded, residents used a by-pass along Lebanon Street which is also part of this tour.

But in the decades following the Revolution, many new residents arrived. They were shoe-makers, itinerant merchants, tradesmen, innkeepers. The pace of commerce quickened. A new Main Street was needed.

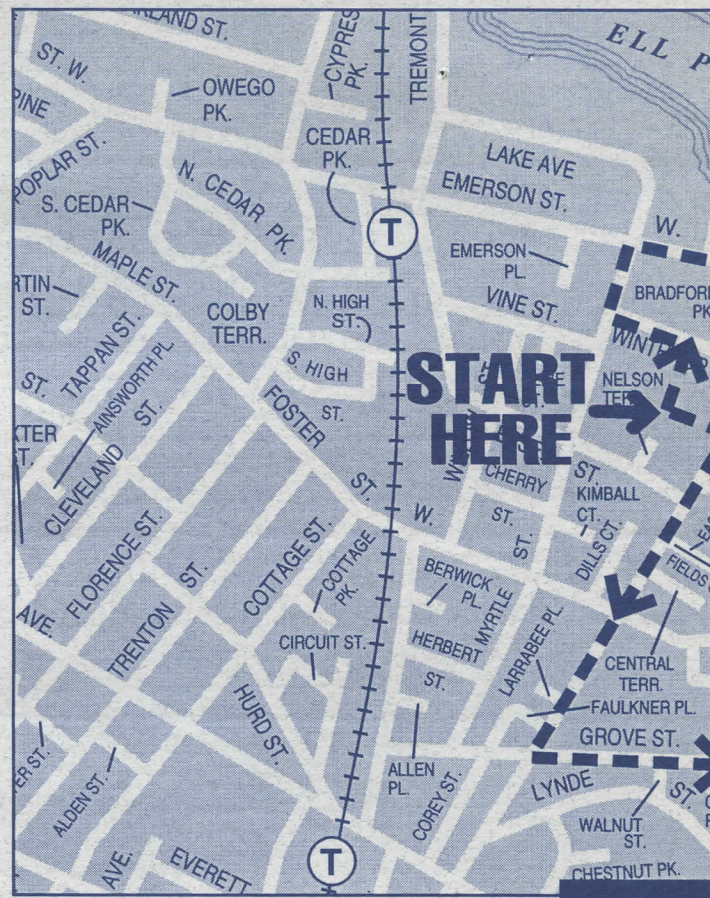
Following the arrival of the Boston & Maine railroad in 1845, and the incorporation of Melrose

as a separate town in 1850, a residential building boom occurred that produced many of the Victorian neighborhoods you see today. Main Street kept pace—to serve the needs of these new residents. A symbol of the town's pride was the grand, Second Empire style City Hall built and dedicated in 1874.

In 1870 a fire destroyed much of the block between between Essex and Foster Streets, the main business district. A number of the present buildings were built in the decade following the fire. Another fire in the steeple of the City Hall in 1937 caused the original tower to be truncated to its present size.

Main Street has seen many transformations. Most recently, in the 1980's, the core business district was declared an historic district. Trees were planted, Victorian lanterns installed, and property owners were given incentives to restore the facades of their buildings. It is now the site of the annual Victorian Fair. Truly, it is a Main Street we can be proud of.

- **Start in the parking lot behind Memorial Hall.** This lot was once the site of Dix's Pond. It was filled in around the turn of the century. Exit the lot on the north side, Winthrop Street. Turn left, then right on Myrtle.
- **The Melrose Public Library** is on the opposite corner as you approach Emerson Street. First founded in 1871 with a gift of 125 books from the Franklin Fraternity, the main library was built with a gift of \$25,000 from Andrew Carnegie on the site of the original Melrose High School (which burned to the ground in 1897). It was dedicated in 1904.
- **Turn right on Emerson** and right again when you reach Main Street.
- **(Emerson Street, both East and West, is one of the grander streets in the city, with residences dating from every decade of Melrose's history. Well worth a walk from one end to the other.)**
- **Mary Livermore's house, 111 West Emerson.** Mary Livermore, one of Melrose's most famous nineteenth century citizens, was a nurse during the Civil War, and later a writer, suffragette and lecturer on the Lyceum circuit. She was also first president of the Melrose Women's Christian Temperance Union, organized in 1882, and is credited with making Melrose a "dry" city.
- **This first block on Main Street** is dominated by the Coolidge School, City Hall, the Central Fire Station, Memorial Hall and two churches.
- **The First Methodist Church** is the first church on your left, just beyond its handsome Victorian parsonage. This congregation first gathered in 1813. The present church dates from 1904.
- **The Calvin Coolidge School, on the left,** served as Melrose's second High School from 1898 until 1933, and later became an elementary school. It is on the site of the Old Burial Ground of North Malden. It has been converted to residential apartments.



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- **Memorial Hall** was dedicated in 1912 as a memorial to those who died in past wars. It was made possible largely through the generosity of John C. F. Sleighton who contributed over a quarter of the building's cost and its magnificent organ.
- **Note the tower** on the side of the Central Fire Station. Its original function was to dry the hoses after fire calls.
- **The First Baptist Church, on the left** at the corner of Upham Street, was organized in 1856. The present granite church dates from 1907.
- **The original City Hall, on the right,** was dedicated in 1874. In grand Victorian style, it had a Second Empire clock tower that was half again as high as the present tower. A fire in 1937 caused the tower and building to be remodeled.
- **The Business District.** The next two blocks are familiar to all Melrose residents. They comprise the main business district of the city, with



Street Tour

an array of retail shops, banks, coffee houses, restaurants and professional service firms. Another well-known landmark is Shaw's Supermarket (formerly Cerretani's Supermarket) half way down Essex Street to the right.

- **On the corner of East Foster Street** is the YMCA. Begun in 1890, the present building was dedicated in 1895. For more than century it has been a center of community activities both for children and adults. Recent renovations have made its exercise facilities state of the art.
- **At the corner of Main and Grove Street**, turn left. The high rise apartment building on your left is the McCarthy Apartments, one of several housing complexes in the city built specifically for the elderly.
- **Grove Street** has modest Victorian houses on each side. Go all the way to Lebanon Street.

- **At the corner of Lebanon Street**, the Washington School is on your right. It was built in 1896, one of three schools funded that year to respond to Melrose's then exploding school age population. It has been converted to private apartments.
- **Across Lebanon Street**, on the corner of Grove, is the Joseph Lynde Homestead dating from 1702. The Lyndes were original settlers in this area, arriving in the 1650's. At one time they owned the southern third of what is now Melrose, and had several farms. This house has had its roof raised, and additions have been added; but it continues to be one of best preserved antique houses in the city. It is still owned and occupied by members of the Lynde family.
- **Turn left** and proceed down Lebanon Street—which in the eighteenth century served as a by-pass to Main Street when Ell Pond overflowed.
- **Near the corner of Upham Street** was Melrose's first public school house, built in the early 1800s.
- **After Upham Street**, the Melrose Wakefield Hospital is on your right. The hospital was first organized in 1893 by Mrs. Decius Beebe. After almost a decade of providing medical services in rented spaces, this land was purchased in 1911, and the original hospital built in 1913. The Colby Wing was added in 1929; in 1988 the present modern hospital building was completed.
- **Turn left at the end of Lebanon** and cross over to the far side of Main Street. You are facing Ell Pond—which in colonial days was much larger and was used as a source of water power to run a grist mill. (The land on which the present High School is built has been "reclaimed.") Have a seat on one of the benches and enjoy the view. Note the Victorian Gazebo built on the knoll to your left overlooking the pond, a gift to the city from the Victorian Melrose Society.
- **Proceed back down Main Street** to Memorial Hall and turn right to the parking area.