



# AROUND THE COMMON: A DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

## **TO BEGIN YOUR TOUR:**

Your tour guide consists of this printable tour narrative and the printable *Around the Common Route Map*, which shows the tour route and the locations of the sites along the way.

*It is recommended that you start your tour at the gates to Worcester Common at the corner of Franklin and Church streets.*

## **Site 1 WORCESTER COMMON**

Worcester Common offers a natural setting in the heart of the city that is pleasing in itself. But, scattered through its grounds, and lining its edges, are memorials, monuments, and buildings that encourage us to think about the city's past. Looking at the Common and its surroundings, this self-guided tour uncovers surprising facts about Worcester's history, its people, and its architecture.

As you begin your walk through the Common, you may be surprised to learn that the spot where you are standing is a physical link with the days when Massachusetts was still an English colony. Today's Worcester Common is part of a tract of land set aside over 300 years ago as the town common of a settlement attempted here in 1663 –when this area was still a wilderness. Although that attempted settlement failed two years later, and a second attempt failed again in 1704, that original “common” tract finally became the town common for a successful settlement, begun in 1713 – which resulted in Worcester's official establishment as a town in 1722.

As was true in other Massachusetts towns in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Common was the site of the meeting house (where both religious and town meetings took place). It also served as the training ground for the town militia and was the home of the principal burying ground. Over time, several town-owned structures were also located on the Common. Among them were the massive stone town pound (for stray cattle and swine); a gun house for the town cannon; a shelter for the town's primitive fire-fighting equipment; and a school.

Today, Worcester Common is the site of community events year-round. It is a popular gathering spot, especially in warm weather, when its tables and chairs offer a lunchtime retreat for those who work or do business downtown. In the wintertime, it is a pleasant spot for ice skating.



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## **Site 1 LEARN MORE: CATTLE SHOWS ON THE COMMON**

It is hard to imagine today, but from about 1818 to around 1870, the Common was the site of the Worcester Agricultural Society's annual October Cattle Show. The week of the festive Cattle Show meant great excitement, not only for Worcester citizens, but also for people who came from all around to attend. On the north side of the Common, near Front Street, four rows of pens were set up for the exhibition of cattle, swine and sheep. The rest of the grounds were given up to booths for the sale of refreshments, and for the wagons of auctioneers selling whips, dry goods, soap, and cheap jewelry.

Peddlers wandered the crowds hawking toothache drops, razors, gilt rings, and other articles. Tents were pitched for exhibits of "monstrosities" – such as a two-headed calf or a mammoth horse. Across Front Street an open space was crowded with stands selling gingerbread, cake, pies, candies, sweet cider, and root beer. In the midst of it all could be heard the oyster man calling, "Walk up, tumble up, and buy a bowl of hot oysters."

Before nine o'clock on opening day, a procession, accompanied by a musical band, started at the home of the Agricultural Society president taking him and his guests to different points of interest. The cattle in their pens were inspected, contests were witnessed, manufactured articles looked at, and an oration listened to before a noontime dinner at Town Hall. Then there was a parade down Main Street of matched oxen (100 yoke or more), a plowing contest, and the awarding of livestock prizes. Most houses in town were filled with guests – since Cattle Show week was a chance to invite friends from elsewhere to join the festivities. Such were the days when agriculture was still an important part of Worcester's livelihood.

## **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 2:**

*To reach the next site, continue through the Common and look for a tour marker on a lamp post to the right of the sidewalk. To the right of the marker is a small cemetery enclosed in an iron fence. This is the Old Burying Ground. You may listen to the tour narrative from this location or, after scanning the QR tag on the marker, you may walk up to the cemetery fence to view the tombstones up close.*

## **Site 2 OLD BURYSING GROUND**

The Burying Ground on Worcester Common is the city's oldest surviving cemetery. A portion of the Church Street end of Worcester Common was set apart as a burying ground as early as 1729. The last burial took place here in 1824. What you see now is only a small part of that cemetery. Look toward Church Street and toward the Soldiers' Monument to find two of the original corners, marked by granite posts. Two more corners are marked by posts found near the western edge of the Burying Ground fence.

The tombstones of several early Worcester citizens are found within the Burying Ground enclosure. One belongs to Jonas Rice, who became Worcester's first permanent settler in 1713 when he and his family established their homestead, all alone, in the wilderness. Another is the memorial of Reverend Thaddeus MacCarty, who, from 1747 to 1784, was pastor of the Congregational Society, which met in the meeting house on the Common. A tall Gothic style monument within the cemetery enclosure is a memorial to Revolutionary War officer, Colonel Timothy Bigelow.

Over the years that followed the last burial here, the cemetery fell into such a state of neglect that the City Council voted in 1853 that the gravestones be laid flat over their respective graves and covered with soil. After inscriptions on the stones had been carefully copied and preserved, that plan was carried out.

In the course of time, all traces of the old burying ground disappeared. Only the 1861 monument to Timothy Bigelow recalled the location of the old cemetery. In 1968, in preparation for downtown urban renewal projects that included the construction on the Common of a reflecting pool (since removed), 111 remains were removed and reinterred in Hope Cemetery. Yet, today, the bones of some three hundred early settlers still repose under the portion of the Common adjacent to Church Street. The section of the Old Burying Ground that we see today, within the iron fence, was restored as part of this same effort.

### **Site 2 LEARN MORE: BIGELOW MONUMENT**

A large Gothic style monument in the Old Burying Ground honors Revolutionary War officer, Timothy Bigelow. A key figure in the emerging patriot cause in Worcester and Worcester County before the outbreak of the war, Captain Bigelow led the town's "Minute Men," who marched from Worcester Common to Cambridge in response to the Lexington alarm on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1775.

Rising during his period of service from the rank of captain to colonel, he was one of only a very few who served from the beginning of the conflict to the end. As colonel of the 15<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment of the Continental Army, Bigelow drilled his men so thoroughly that it is said that General George Washington, when reviewing Bigelow's company, complimented him saying, "This is discipline, indeed." Col. Bigelow was with Washington at Valley Forge and fought in the decisive battles of Monmouth, and Yorktown. At the end of the war he was stationed at the military installation at West Point and was later placed in command of the national arsenal at Springfield, in western Massachusetts.

Yet, Timothy Bigelow's homecoming was not a happy one. Returning to Worcester in ill health after eight years of military hardship, he found his property encumbered in debt and his ability to work at his trade as a blacksmith seriously diminished. Unable to pay his bills and threatened with the loss of his home and property, Bigelow was sent to debtors' prison, where he died a short time later in March of 1790 at the age of 51. The Bigelow Monument on Worcester Common, a gift of his great-grandson, Colonel Timothy Bigelow Lawrence, was erected in 1861 to honor this courageous Worcester citizen for his role in the birth of our nation.

### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 3:**

*To reach the next site, start at the Old Burying Ground marker and continue along the sidewalk toward City Hall. Then turn right to follow the sidewalk leading to the World War II memorial, which you will see on your right. Look for a tour marker on the iron fence to your left (at the edge of the oval plaza). Scan the QR tag to begin the audio description of the World War II Memorial.*

### **Site 3 WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL**

From its earliest days, Worcester Common was a training ground for the town's militia – a fact that makes it particularly appropriate that, today, monuments honoring the military service of local men and women are found throughout its grounds.

On the opposite side of this sidewalk is the World War II Memorial – a tribute to the 27,214 city residents who fought in that war. Unveiled in 2009, it replaces an earlier memorial at the edge of the large 1971 reflecting pool (now-removed), which once extended from the foot of the Civil War Soldiers' Monument toward City Hall.

Today's memorial includes three flagpoles adjoining the original plaque taken from the reflecting pool. To its left is a circular granite monument etched with the insignia of each branch of the armed services. Flanking it, blocks in the pavement spell the names of the Atlantic and Pacific theaters of the war. The granite chosen for this memorial matches the Milford pink granite of City Hall.

Another World War II memorial is also found on the Common. At the Franklin Street stop on this tour, be sure to see the bronze *Lieutenant John Vincent Powers Monument* and read about the valor of the first Worcester citizen to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Look for other military memorials toward the end of the tour, as you walk along the Church Street edge of the Common.

### **Site 3 LEARN MORE: MEETING HOUSE AND RAILROAD TRACKS**

Look toward City Hall and let your imagination turn back time. On the spot where City Hall stands today, try to visualize a much smaller, simpler structure – a wooden Meeting House, built in 1763. Town meetings held there shortly before the Revolutionary War were the scene of heated arguments between Patriots and Loyalists.

An especially memorable event occurred at a town meeting held in August of 1774, when Patriots humiliated town clerk, Clark Chandler – forcing him to obliterate, both with his pen and ink-dipped fingers, an unauthorized Loyalist entry in the town records denouncing patriot activities it called “unlawful.” Two years later, the Meeting House again played an important role in Revolutionary history when on July 14, 1776, from its porch, the Declaration of Independence was read aloud for the first time in New England.

The Meeting House was originally used both for town meetings and religious services. But, when a brick town hall was built next door (at Main and Front streets) in 1825, the Meeting House was used exclusively as the Congregational church. The two buildings stood side-by-side until the Meeting House was taken down in 1889.

As we think of the old Meeting House and Town Hall standing on this site, it is a surprise to learn that, in 1840, a set of railroad tracks was laid through the Common – running right behind the two buildings. Imagine tracks, destined for the old Foster Street Station, running from the center of the building at 20 Franklin Street, crossing the terrace behind today's City Hall, and continuing to Front Street, where they passed through the spot where a narrow brick building stands today at 36-38 Front Street. Railroad trains continued to travel through Worcester Common until 1877, when the tracks were removed after the opening of the first Union Station at Washington Square.

### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 4:**

*To reach the next site, walk toward City Hall, passing around the oval plaza. This is a good chance to get a close up look at the handsome carved stone ornament on the back of City Hall. After taking*

*a look at City Hall, turn right toward Front Street. When you arrive at the Front Street sidewalk, turn left and continue toward the tall glass office building on Main Street. Just after passing the entrance to the City Hall garage on your left, look for a tour marker on a lamp post to your right. You will find it near the street edge of the sidewalk. Scan the QR tag to activate the audio tour for information about the buildings on Front Street.*

#### **Site 4 FRONT STREET**

It is said that Front Street was first worn into a path by early settlers traveling to church and town meetings at the Meeting House on the Common. As the town grew, streets around the Common were lined with houses. Yet, even before the Revolutionary War, there were businesses here too. Loyalist Judge Chandler and his sons operated a successful store on the corner of Main and Front streets (the site of today's Harrington Corner). By the 1850s, Worcester was a fast-growing industrial city with stores and business buildings quickly going up around the Common.

Photographs dating from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century through the 1960s show Front Street as a street crowded with shoppers. Distinctively urban – it was lined with department stores, variety stores, retail shops, and theatres. Some will remember shopping at Front Street department stores, Sherer's and American Supply, and at the popular variety stores, Woolworth's and Newberry's.

Look up and down Front Street today and you will see a wide range of commercial buildings. Harrington Corner, to your left, built in 1850, is the oldest. Others date from the 1880s through the 1940s. Modern buildings seen east of Commercial Street were part of the 1971 urban renewal project that included the *Galleria Shopping Mall*, which – until its 2012 demolition – blocked off Front Street.

At 44 Front Street is the seven-story, red brick Chase Building – the city's tallest building when it was built in 1886. Originally capped with mansard roofs and a landmark, two-story, central tower, it took its inspiration from the early “skyscrapers” then being built in Chicago and New York.

On the corner of Commercial Street, the 1897, yellow brick, former home of Sherer's Department Store is among Worcester's most handsome downtown commercial buildings.

Across the street is the Midtown Mall, a two-story, Art Deco style block. Built in 1941 for F. W. Woolworth, this 5 & 10 cent store, with a lunch counter and soda fountain, was a popular downtown shopping destination through the early 1970s.

#### **Site 4 LEARN MORE: HOWARD STREET CLOCK**

Across Front Street from where you are standing, at 50 Front Street, is an 1880's street clock. It was originally installed around the corner, at 316 Main Street, by Worcester Five Cents Savings Bank, whose name still encircles the face of the clock. Fabricated by E. Howard & Company of Roxbury, it was electrified in 1952 and moved to its present site in 1985.

During the nineteenth century, cities and towns provided citizens with the time of day by placing clocks on public buildings and by erecting street clocks, like this one, on sidewalk locations. They were often underwritten by businesses as a form of advertising. Originally an eight-day clock, it was usually wound on Saturday mornings (the seventh day), leaving 24 hours to spare. Between 1871 and 1889, thirteen Howard clocks were installed on the streets of Worcester. This clock was restored by Preservation

Worcester in 2007 through generous grants from the Fuller Foundation and the Worcester Cultural Commission.

#### **Site 4 LEARN MORE: CELTIC CROSS**

Turn to look at the Front Street side of City Hall. Here can be seen a granite monument in the form of a Celtic cross, honoring Worcester's Irish. The Irish were the city's largest 19<sup>th</sup> century foreign immigrant group – and its first Roman Catholics. The Irish first arrived here in large numbers to construct the Blackstone Canal in the 1820s. By 1920, Worcester's immigrant and second generation Irish, together, numbered over 31,000 – out of a total population of nearly 180,000. The monument bears low-relief symbols referring to Irish tradition, the four Irish provinces, Irish immigration, the construction of the Blackstone Canal, and the establishment of the city's first Roman Catholic parish, Christ Church (now St. John's), on Temple Street.

#### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 5:**

*To reach the next site, continue walking in the direction of the glass tower on Main Street. You will see Worcester City Hall on your left. As you walk, look up and enjoy the architecture of City Hall. Turn left to pass in front of City Hall. You will see the statue of Senator George Frisbie Hoar on your left. If you wish, pause to read the inscriptions on the base of the statue. As you near the grand staircase in front of City Hall, look for a tour marker on the fence on your left (just before the staircase). Scan the QR tag on the tour marker to activate your tour of City Hall.*

#### **Site 5 CITY HALL**

Built on the site of the 1763 Meeting House, Worcester's new City Hall opened in 1898. This grand, elaborately detailed, Renaissance Revival style building is a symbol of the city's wealth and industrial prosperity at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Constructed of Milford pink granite, it was designed by the respected Boston architectural firm of Peabody & Stearns and built by nationally-recognized Worcester building contractors, the Norcross Brothers.

An expression of power and strength, the soaring clock tower was modeled after the tower of Palazzo Vecchio (Pa-lat'-zo Vekk'-yo), the city hall of Florence, Italy. Rising 205 feet in the air and accented by medieval-style crenellated parapets, it is topped off with a "Witch's Cap" at the skyline. At the grand entrance is a pair of gracefully curved staircases that lead to a covered balcony above, where, in the days before radio and television, city officials stood to address the citizenry.

The building's imposing design includes round-arched windows and doors and a profusion of carved Classical details. Look up to find symbolic lion's heads, a spread-winged eagle over the entrance, and a wreath of flowers and fruit at the base of the clock tower. Also, look for a heart in the center of a wreath – a reminder that Worcester is the "Heart of the Commonwealth." Built at the height of the city's industrial success, City Hall is truly "a palace for the people of Worcester."

While standing back from the entrance to City Hall, look down and you will find Worcester's smallest monument. Fixed in the pavement are a bronze star and a small bronze plaque. The star marks the spot where the Declaration of Independence was first publicly read in New England on July 14, 1776.

When a special messenger paused for refreshment in Worcester while carrying a copy of the Declaration from Philadelphia to Boston, the town's patriot newspaperman, Isaiah Thomas, obtained the document and read it aloud from the western porch of the Meeting House. The Meeting House was taken down in 1889, but the star serves as a reminder of this historic event.

### **Site 5 LEARN MORE: ISAIAH THOMAS**

Isaiah Thomas was a printer and Revolutionary War patriot. Before the Revolution, he published a Boston newspaper, *The Massachusetts Spy*, which – espousing the patriot cause – won little affection from the British. Three days before the Battle of Concord (in April of 1775), Thomas fled with his printing press to the safer and more supportive environment of Worcester, where, seven months earlier, Worcester County patriots had ousted Crown-appointed judges from the courthouse – ending British rule forever.

In Worcester, Thomas quickly resumed publication of his newspaper, with his press first set up in the home of patriot Timothy Bigelow. Later, establishing himself here as a publisher and bookseller, he also built a paper mill and bindery, while continuing to issue his newspaper until 1802.

In 1812, Isaiah Thomas founded the American Antiquarian Society, the country's first historical society of national scope. While his personal library of approximately 8,000 items was to form the nucleus of the society's holdings, he worked avidly to encourage the organization's members from across the country to make donations of newspapers, books, and historical artifacts from their home regions.

Upon his death in 1831, Thomas bequeathed his entire library, his collection of early American newspapers, as well as his personal papers and records, to the American Antiquarian Society – now located on Salisbury Street in Worcester, where his printing press is also on display.

Today the Antiquarian Society holds the world's most complete collection of American newspapers printed before 1876 and copies of approximately two-thirds of all the books printed in this country before 1820.

### **Site 5 LEARN MORE: SENATOR GEORGE FRISBIE HOAR**

To the left of the main entrance to City Hall is a monument to Worcester citizen, lawyer, and United States senator, George Frisbie Hoar. Testament to the broad popular respect for Senator Hoar is this life-size bronze statue created in his memory – made possible by wide public subscription. The work of noted American sculptor Daniel Chester French, it was dedicated in June of 1908. Plaques on the base of the monument describe his contributions.

Born in Concord, Massachusetts, Senator Hoar was a Harvard graduate, and an active citizen of Worcester, where he made his home for more than half a century. For much of his adult life he served in public office: in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, the Massachusetts Senate, the United States House of Representatives, and, finally, in the United States Senate – an office he held for 27 years until his death in 1904. Throughout his life he was known and respected for his democratic principles and thoughtful decision making.

A scholar at heart, Senator Hoar supported the founding of the Worcester Public Library, was a founder and trustee of both Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Clark University, and served as an overseer of Harvard College. Reflecting his interest in American history, he was a member of the Worcester Society

of Antiquity (now the Worcester Historical Museum), the American Antiquarian Society, and supported the establishment of the Trustees of Reservations – one of the nation’s earliest landscape and historic preservation organizations. A direct descendant of early settlers of Plymouth Colony, Senator Hoar was responsible for initiating the process that returned to the United States from England the original 17<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript written by Governor William Bradford, entitled *Of Plymouth Colony* – a first-hand record of the Pilgrim experience in the New World from 1630 to 1651.

### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 6:**

*To reach the next site, continue walking in front of City Hall, going straight ahead toward Franklin Street. After passing the second City Hall staircase, look for a tour marker on the iron fence to your left. Scan the QR tag on the marker to begin the Main Street segment of the tour.*

### **Site 6 MAIN STREET**

From the late-19<sup>th</sup> century through the 1960s, this section of Main Street was Worcester’s premier shopping district. Across from City Hall were department stores – Denholm & McKay and the John C. MacInnes Company. Alongside them were banks and a variety of smaller shops. But by the 1960s, even though there was still considerable foot traffic downtown, a decline in business was apparent.

It was this less than optimistic vision of the future that spurred community leaders to devise a plan that led to the demolition of much of the heart of downtown and the creation of a new business and commercial complex, *Worcester Center*, at the opposite end of the Common. Complete with an indoor shopping mall, the *Galleria*; two new high-rise office buildings; and ample parking garages, the complex opened in 1971.

Associated with that effort to “remake” downtown was the construction of the shimmering glass office tower across from City Hall– to your left. With its 22- and 24-story twin towers, encased in acres of thermo-pane glass, and rising to a height of 288 feet, it was Worcester’s tallest building. Designed by the internationally-recognized architects, Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates– the building made a powerful modernist statement in the heart of downtown.

Quickly established as a city landmark, and one that continues to dominate the landscape today, this building, known as *Worcester Plaza*, was successful, from the beginning, as the city’s pre-eminent provider of “Class One” office space. Originally built for Worcester County National Bank, the tower became the home in 2013 of Santander Bank, the U. S. unit of Spain’s Santander Group.

As you stand on Main Street, look up at the glass tower across the way. When the angle and light are right, City Hall’s soaring clock tower becomes a glimmering reflection in the sleek façade of the glass-clad building. Completed in 1975, *Worcester Plaza* was the city’s most dramatic architectural leap into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, by reflecting the buildings around it, the modern skyscraper also pays homage to its older neighbors.

### **Site 6 LEARN MORE: DENHOLM & MCKAY DEPARTMENT STORE**

Look to your left down Main Street for a view of the streamlined, Art Moderne façade of the former Denholm & McKay Department Store. For most of a century, Denholm’s was Worcester’s premier



department store – a major attraction in the busy Main Street shopping district near City Hall. Established in 1871, the store moved to a large new building at this location in 1882.

At its peak, Denholm & McKay occupied more than five acres of retail floor space – including five stories and a basement, plus an annex, added at the rear in 1906. Denholm’s tax valuation was more than three times that of its nearest competitor, the John C. MacInnes Department Store – a few doors north on Main Street.

In 1951, in keeping with its reputation for being thoroughly up-to-date, Denholm’s gave itself a sleek and fashionable new look – sheathing-over its old, red brick façade. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, this thoroughly modern store was an institution in the city – known for the elegant displays in its plate-glass windows; its huge show of lights during the Holiday season; first-in-the-city escalators (in 1963); as well as always-up-to-date merchandise and trendy fashion shows.

But, the opening of the *Worcester Center Galleria* in 1971 brought trouble. With the new mall came both new competition and the loss of Main Street neighbors Filene’s Department Store and Sharfman’s Jewelers. Adding to the decline in pedestrian traffic along Main Street, other businesses were lost when buildings were demolished nearby for the *Worcester Plaza* office tower project.

Denholm’s management had turned down an offer to become a principal anchor in the *Galleria*. Instead, it opened a branch store in the new Auburn Mall. Then, only a short time later, in 1974, Denholm’s closed its doors – mired in bankruptcy, a victim of internal financial difficulties, as well as setbacks associated with the opening of the new downtown mall. Today, still bearing the Denholm name, the building now houses a mix of office and retail uses.

### **Site 6 LEARN MORE: PARK BUILDING**

The eleven-story Park Building on the corner of Main and Franklin streets is one of three high-rise, Classical Revival style office buildings built downtown on Main Street between 1897 and 1915. Offering attractive, modern office space, this early “tall” building was acclaimed for its architectural excellence and praised for having converted underutilized real estate at a vital downtown intersection to a higher valued use.

Look upward to see Classical Revival features, such as portrait medallions, green marble insets, shield and dentil motifs, engaged Corinthian columns framing the windows of the upper floors, and handsome bronze ornamental trim at the eaves.

In the 1970s, with the construction of the *Worcester Plaza’s* glass twin-towers on Main Street and the two high-rise buildings associated with the *Worcester Center Galleria*, up-to-date downtown offices became plentiful. Outmoded as office space, the Park Building was soon rehabilitated as residential apartments. In its new role, little changed on the exterior, this noteworthy tall building continues to add dignity to the area surrounding City Hall and Worcester Common – an important reminder of the city’s early-20<sup>th</sup>-century “Golden Age” as a prosperous industrial city.

### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 7:**

*To reach the next site, continue toward Franklin Street and turn left on Franklin – continuing until you reach the Lieutenant Power Monument on your left. You will find a historical marker on the*

*fence to the right of the Power Monument. If you wish, you may pause to read the inscriptions on the monument. To activate the Franklin Street segment of the tour, scan the QR tag on the tour marker.*

### **Site 7 FRANKLIN STREET**

Imagine that you were standing at this spot in 1908. Across the street you would see a surprisingly unimpressive group of buildings – including an old, wood, freight house and the remains of a railroad yard – an area left undeveloped for years after the 1877 removal of tracks that once ran across the Common. To their right are a “quick lunch” diner and a style-less, two-story, wood, commercial building. Today’s streetscape – extending from Main to Portland Street – is the result of a sort of “urban renewal” transformation that took place between 1910 and 1925. During that period, all of the earlier buildings in this block were replaced with new buildings in versions of the then-popular Classical style, making this section of Franklin Street one of downtown’s most handsome blocks.

In 1910 and 1914, substantial brick buildings replaced the old wood structures across the street. No longer recognizable today, they were unified in 1954 behind a single façade at 20 Franklin Street. To your far left, on the corner of Portland Street, the *Bancroft Hotel* rose in 1913 – replacing an old wood building and a former brick church. At Main and Franklin, the “skyscraper” *Park Building* opened in 1915. Then, in 1925, the *Chamber of Commerce Building* (now Bay State Savings Bank) filled the old railroad yard – and the transformation was complete.

While all of the buildings in this block have been adapted to new uses, most have preserved their original facades. Only 20 Franklin (across the street) has a more clean-lined 21<sup>st</sup> century façade, a remodeling that occurred following the move of the *Telegram & Gazette* newspaper offices – after 102 years at this location – to the other side of the Common in 2012.

Before heading to the next site, turn and take a look at the larger-than-life-size bronze statue of a soldier, a monument to World War II hero, Lieutenant John Vincent Power– the first Worcester citizen to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The story of his valor can be read on the base of the monument.

### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 8:**

*To reach the next site, continue along the sidewalk down Franklin Street toward the gates to the Common that stand opposite the former Bancroft Hotel. Look for the historical marker on the fence to the right of the gates. Scan the QR tag to begin the Bancroft Hotel segment of the audio tour.*

### **Site 8 BANCROFT HOTEL**

Across the street is the former *Bancroft Hotel*– once a grand hotel – now an apartment building.

The Bancroft Hotel opened amid great fanfare in 1913 as the city’s grandest and most prestigious hotel. Initially offering 320 guest rooms of the highest quality, the imposing, nine-story, Beaux Arts style hotel was a complete success from the day it opened. Its interior appointments included an opulent lobby, a grand ballroom, a luxurious ladies’ reception parlor, two “white linen” dining rooms, and, of course, handsome guest rooms.

Soon becoming the place in Worcester among the socially prominent for major social events, it was, without peer, the premier hotel for well-heeled guests, dignitaries, and the elite of the business world. In 1918, for its patrons, many of whom were now arriving by that still-new means of transportation, the automobile, the hotel built the city's first parking garage – nearby on Portland Street. The Bancroft's success led to the 1926 construction of an addition – expanding its capacity to 500 rooms.

The stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression that ensued, and then the Second World War, took their tolls, but the Bancroft continued to serve as Worcester's premier hotel throughout those difficult times. Yet, in the post-war years, the rise of the automobile and the corresponding decline in travel by passenger train, led to the demise of downtown hotels in all but the largest American cities. Early in 1964, the Bancroft closed its doors and was converted to rental apartments.

A metaphor for downtown Worcester: the Bancroft Hotel flourished during the city's "Golden Age" (when it was a prosperous manufacturing city), and faltered half a century later amid the declining fortunes of industry and the waning of the American "downtown." Today, despite its changed use, the Bancroft's exterior is largely unaltered and this grand edifice still plays an important architectural role as it overlooks Worcester Common.

### **Site 8 LEARN MORE: CAPITOL THEATRE**

To the left of the Bancroft on Franklin Street is a white building with a blank face. Now awaiting a new use, this was once the *Capitol Theatre* – designed by Roger Garland of New York and opened in 1926 as a "palace" theatre. In the days, before television, people often went to the movies several times a week. To meet that demand, four "palace" theatres (including today's Hanover and Palladium theatres) were built in Worcester. Each seated more than 2,000 and vied to attract patrons with an elaborate interior designed to transport movie-goers to a world of "make-believe."

The Capitol was not "just another palace theatre." It was also an "atmospheric" theatre. Here patrons could see a movie and a vaudeville show while living the fantasy of enjoying their entertainment seated in an open-air amphitheatre in far-away Spain. Projectors transformed the theatre's specially-curved ceiling into an open sky – alive with moving clouds and twinkling stars. The moon rose on one side and, by the time the show was over, it had set on the other. In 1968, the *Capitol* reopened as the *Paris Cinema*, showing first-run films, but eventually becoming a venue for "adult" films – finally, closing in 2006. Today, the former Capitol is believed to be the last surviving "atmospheric" theatre in New England.

### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 9:**

*To reach the next site, enter Worcester Common through the gates behind you and continue along the path that leads to the tall Soldiers' Monument. You will pass the Old Burying Ground on your left. Pass in front of the Soldiers' Monument, enjoying the sculpture as you go. Then, leave the Common through the gates located at the left of the monument, near the intersection of Front and Church streets. Turn left on the sidewalk and look for the tour marker on the outside of the fence to the right of the gate post. After scanning the QR tag to activate the audio tour for the Soldiers' Monument, you may want to go back to the monument again to view it up close.*

## **Site 9 SOLDIERS' MONUMENT**

The outstanding Soldiers' Monument at the northeastern corner of Worcester Common is a memorial to the city's Civil War heroes. It is the work of noted American sculptor Randolph Rogers, who also designed the Soldiers' Monument at Gettysburg. Dedicated July 15, 1874, it was made possible by an appropriation from the City of Worcester aided by private donations.

Around the high base of the monument stand four bronze figures depicting the various branches of military service: Navy, Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery. Worcester inventor and loom manufacturer, George Crompton, who headed the Citizens' Committee to raise private funds for the monument, served as the model for the figure of the sailor – representing the Navy. Mounted on the base are plaques. One is inscribed, “Erected by the people of Worcester in memory of her sons who died for the unity of the Republic A.D. 1861-1865”. Another gives names of Worcester men who died in the conflict. Among others, there is a plaque bearing a profile portrait of Abraham Lincoln in low relief. Rising above the base is a tall Corinthian column crowned with a bronze statue of Nike, goddess of victory. Surrounding the monument are cannons with their muzzles buried in the ground as symbols of peace.

## **Site 9 LEARN MORE: URBAN RENEWAL**

Stand at the corner of Front and Church Streets and look up at the two modern office buildings – remnants of Worcester's mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century effort to remake downtown. In July of 1971 the *Worcester Center* complex, comprised of these two office towers, a 4,000-car parking garage, and a fully enclosed shopping mall, known as the *Galleria*, opened to much acclaim. For the next 41 years, Front Street ended at the entrance to the shopping mall that spanned the distance between these two towers. Today, the mall and most of the garages are gone. Front Street once again extends eastward toward Union Station.

The \$127,000,000 Worcester Center project involved the clearing of 17 acres of urban fabric adjacent to the Common and the relocation of 292 businesses and ten families. Front Street was shortened and six other streets disappeared from the map. But, in 1971 many believed it was worth it. Gone was the “obsolete brick jumble” that some thought downtown had become.

The mall was sleek and modern and Boston department stores, Jordan Marsh and Filene's, served as anchors. Modeled after the glass-covered Galleria in Milan, its focal point was a grand atrium – its glazed, barrel-vaulted roof letting in plenty of natural light. Adding to the upscale environment were a dancing fountain and a gleaming polished aluminum “sunburst” sculpture.

While many appreciated the mall and its amenities, some were miffed by the changes it had wrought on their familiar downtown, and others refused to shop where they had to pay to park in a parking garage. So, over time, and despite the best intentions, Worcester Center never really lived up to expectations. Even when the shopping center was revamped as Worcester Common Fashion Outlets in 1994, it failed to thrive – closing in 2006.

Now, with the mall gone and Front Street reopened, the City has embraced the new *City Square Project*. By restoring the lost street grid and by encouraging a variety of retail, office, entertainment, and residential development, it attempts to make downtown work like a city and not like a suburban shopping center.

## **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 10:**

*To reach the next site, start from the gates near the Soldiers' Monument marker and follow the sidewalk that runs alongside Church Street (with Worcester Common on your right). You will see a modern office building on your left and the Worcester Public Library in the distance. Continue along the edge of Worcester Common until you reach the Burnside "Turtle Boy" Fountain. Turn toward Notre Dame des Canadiens Church and look for a tour marker on a lamp post in front of the fountain. Scan the QR tag to begin the audio tour of Notre Dame.*

### **Site 10 NOTRE DAME DES CANADIENS**

The stone church of Notre Dame des Canadiens – a downtown landmark – was completed in 1929. Although its design was inspired by medieval French churches, its character, and details – the tall Roman arch, the ornamental rose window, and the lantern at the skyline – are pleasingly clean-lined and modern in their expression.

This parish, founded in 1869, was the mother church of Worcester's several Roman Catholic French-Canadian parishes. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, French Canadians were Worcester's second largest immigrant group – outnumbered only by the Irish.

Notre Dame's first home was a brick church, which stood on the site of the former Bancroft Hotel, nearby on Franklin Street. After a fire in 1908, the congregation relocated to the then-vacant old First Baptist Church. In 1928 that church was demolished to make way for the current building. The new church continued in use by its original parish until 2007, when it was closed in a consolidation effort by the Diocese of Worcester. Sold in 2010 to City Square II Development Company, the building awaits a new use.

The lone Church Street survivor of 1960's demolition for the massive *Worcester Center* urban renewal project, Notre Dame is the only church building still standing around the Common today. Yet, when the first Mass was celebrated in the parish's original church on Franklin Street in 1870, four other churches could be found either on, or facing, the Common – including the historic 1763 Meeting House on the site of today's City Hall. Over time, all of these other churches were lost as the various congregations merged with others or rebuilt and relocated to other parts of the city.

### **Site 10 LEARN MORE: BURNSIDE FOUNTAIN**

A popular landmark at the southeast entrance to Worcester Common is the Burnside Fountain – fondly known as "Turtle Boy." Graced by a bronze statue of a carefree boy riding a hawksbill sea turtle, it was designed as a watering trough for horses. Water originally poured from the turtle's mouth into a series of four drinking basins for horses on top of the pedestal. At the rear of the pedestal is a ground-level trough for dogs. Today the monument no longer functions as a fountain.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries a philanthropic movement in this country centered on the difficult lives of the many horses that provided transportation in cities. Philanthropists wishing to ease the lives of these animals provided public watering troughs. Some were quite simple, but others, such as the Burnside Fountain, featured handsome sculptures that were true works of art.

Harriet P. F. Burnside gave \$5,000 to the City in 1903 to create a sculpture for the public and their horses in memory of her father. Designed and sculpted by Charles Harvey, the work on the "Turtle Boy"

sculpture was overseen by noted American sculptor Daniel Chester French. Sherry Fry completed the sculpture after Harvey's death. Architect Henry Bacon, who later designed the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., was responsible for the design of the pedestal.

### **WALKING INSTRUCTIONS TO SITE 11:**

*To reach the last site on the tour, walk in the direction of the Worcester Public Library, stopping near Franklin Street. Look for a tour marker on the traffic signal post at this intersection. Scan the QR tag to hear the audio tour for the Worcester Public Library.*

### **Site 11 WORCESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY**

The Worcester Public Library was among the earliest free public libraries in the United States. It was established in 1859, when prominent Worcester physician, Dr. John Green, donated his 7,000-volume collection to the City of Worcester for that purpose. For over 100 years, the library occupied a gracious brick building on Elm Street. There, long-time head librarian Samuel Swett Green and his successors played a pivotal role in shaping the philosophy of the public library movement in this country, as well as in establishing many common library services familiar to us today.

In 1964 the library moved to its present location in the heart of a downtown, just then beginning to undergo massive urban renewal. Designed by New Orleans architects Curtis & Davis, the airy new concrete library was an early urban renewal project – built on the site of a six-story, brick factory building, taken for that purpose. In 2001, the 1960's library was renovated and doubled in size with a Post-Modern style addition designed by Boston architects Tappe Associates. Overlooking Worcester Common, this new façade sports a sweeping curve at the eaves and a distinctive turret. In 2002 the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce recognized the project with a “Silver Hammer Award,” for its “extraordinary visual and aesthetic impact on the physical landscape of the community.”

At the library entrances are kiln-formed art glass doors created by local artist Stephen Knapp. On display inside are artifacts including: the 1964 library's copper-sheathed doors by New York artist Leslie Segal; iconic owl sculptures salvaged from the old Elm Street library; and WPA-era murals by Rolf Nickerson from the city's now-demolished U.S. Post Office Parcel Post Station. Outside the library's south entrance, a handsome bronze monument by sculptor Antonio Tobias Mendez, honors Worcester's turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century, African-American, international bicycle champion, “Major” Taylor.

**THIS IS THE OFFICIAL END OF YOUR TOUR.** *However, the Worcester Public Library invites you to come inside during regular business hours to look at artifacts mentioned on the tour. If you are interested in learning more about Worcester and its history, you will find historical materials in the Local History Room on the third floor of the library.*