

Walking

**QUINSIGAMOND VILLAGE
WORCESTER, MA**



Andrew Gustaf Holst, a sinker (wire die maker), at South Works, c. 1915.

Tour

**Visit a village
hidden within a town,
Worcester's own
"Little Sweden."**

[Intro](#)

[Walking Tour](#)

[Directions](#)



**Blackstone
Heritage
Corridor, Inc.**

WATER POWERED!
BlackstoneHeritageCorridor.org

Quinsigamond Village

Tucked behind old warehouses and the snarl of urban traffic is one of Worcester's hidden treasures: Quinsigamond Village. At first glance, the area might seem like nothing more than a bit of America's post-industrial landscape; one more neighborhood where factories closed and life turned grey. Yet, look again. Four church spires stand against the skyline, nestled between family businesses and tree-lined streets filled with handsome, three-decker homes. Quinsigamond's school and library stand at its heart, their historic facades important enough to preserve, even as modern buildings are erected around them. And everywhere – in the signs, family names, architecture, and conversation – is what may be the village's greatest legacy: the mark of the thousands of Swedish immigrants who, for generations, called Quinsigamond their home.

Although Worcester began as a farming region, the damming of streams allowed small industries to develop. In the 1830s and 1840s, rail lines helped transform the city into a transportation and manufacturing center. The Quinsigamond area – a narrow valley isolated for centuries by two steep ridges carved by the Blackstone River – became a vital part

of that change. As early as the 1770s, publisher Isaiah Thomas operated a paper mill at the river's headwaters, producing the revolutionary newspaper, *The Massachusetts Spy*. And in the 1840s, Ichabod Washburn established what would become Worcester's leading industry: an iron rolling mill and wire factory. As thousands of workers sought housing close to their worksite, the Village spread along Millbury Street.

Largely Irish Catholic from the 1840s to the 1860s, the Village became a "Little Sweden" after 1870. Isolated by geography and drawn together by kin and culture, Swedish iron workers, mostly hired by the Washburn & Moen wire works, forged a world all their own. Most came from the same iron-working region of Sweden and many were Protestant and temperance advocates. Newspapers, neighborhood businesses, institutions, and Republican political candidates were sustained for generations by one of the largest Swedish communities in the United States.

In the late 20th century, however, the villagers experienced "de-industrialization", as corporations increasingly abandoned domestic industry in favor of foreign manufacturing. As local production waned, scrap metal was shipped by rail from Worcester to Providence, and then on to Japanese steel mills. While the last iron works closed in the 1970s, the Swedish community nonetheless persists. Influenced by its traditions, Quinsigamond retains a strong sense of its village identity.



Walking Tour

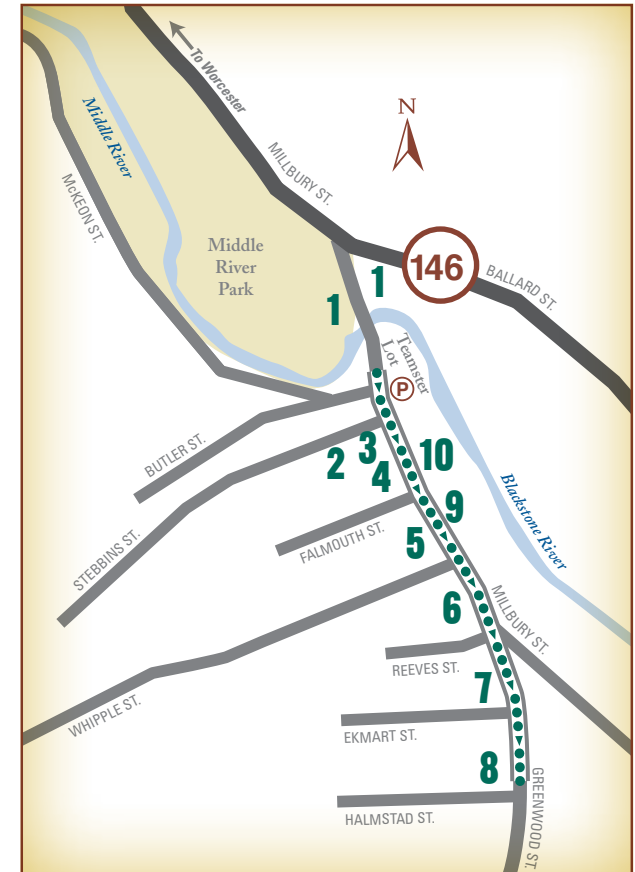
The tour takes about one and one-half hours.

1 Blackstone River Railroad Bridge/Washburn & Moen Buildings

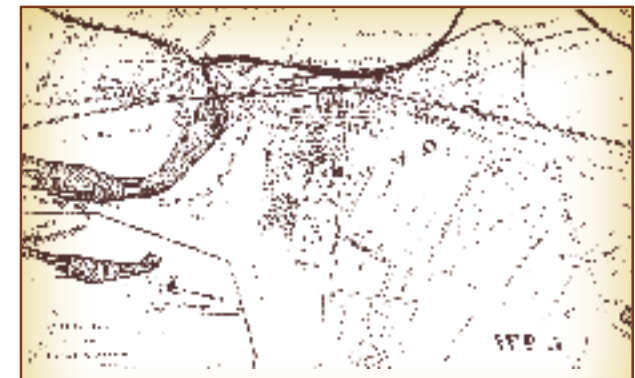
Begin your tour at the Teamsters Hall on Millbury Street. You can see where the forces of water (or coal fired steam) and transportation intersect: the railroad tracks and the headwaters

of the Blackstone River. In 1846, Ichabod Washburn harnessed both for what became Washburn & Moen's South Works, where he developed new ways to draw wire. Producing telegraph, telephone, piano, and barbed wire and suspension cable for bridges, railways, and manufacturing, his three plants became a major Worcester industry and the largest wire producer in the world.

Just past the river you will see two Washburn buildings, surviving remnants of the extensive industrial complex once situated here. The building on the right, built between 1886 and 1892, was a galvanizing house; the one on the left, built between 1870 and 1886, made wire rope. It was said you needed a Swedish passport to pass between them since, by 1900, 79 percent of the nearly 3,000 villagers were Swedish, and 85 percent worked for Washburn & Moen.



QUINSIGAMOND VILLAGE



When Washburn & Moen published this 1881 advertisement, they made nearly "one hundred kinds of wire." By 1900, the iron rolling mills at South Works filled all of the land between Millbury and Ballard streets. The company made 418 products, 245 tons per day. Bought by American Steel & Wire in 1899, it became a division of U.S. Steel by 1901. In 1977, South Works, New England's last major steel mill, closed.

Walking Tour continued

2 Quinsigamond United Methodist Church (#9 Stebbins Street)

Although Worcester's First Swedish immigrants in 1868 were Lutherans, by 1875 most villagers belonged to "free churches" that had broken from Sweden's Lutheran faith. Many were Methodists, who quickly assumed a primary role as village leaders and entrepreneurs. In 1878 they formed the first Swedish Methodist Episcopal Church in New England. In 1884, aided by Yankee Methodists and wire manufacturers, they built a church on this site. In 1893, a brick first floor was added and the building redesigned to resemble the "mother church" of their homeland. The structure was rebuilt after a fire in 1975.

Methodists, born in the iron regions of Varmland, Sweden, stopped briefly to work in the mines of Michigan's upper-peninsula before coming to Worcester. Once here, church trustees did more than oversee religious matters; they also developed many Swedish businesses. Their first, the First Swedish Co-op Store Co. (a grocery begun in 1883), proved to be a training ground for young entrepreneurs. Methodists soon were

running businesses in fish, meat, dairy products, dry goods, baked goods, wood supplies, and electrical repair. They also ran boarding houses and were active in Worcester politics.

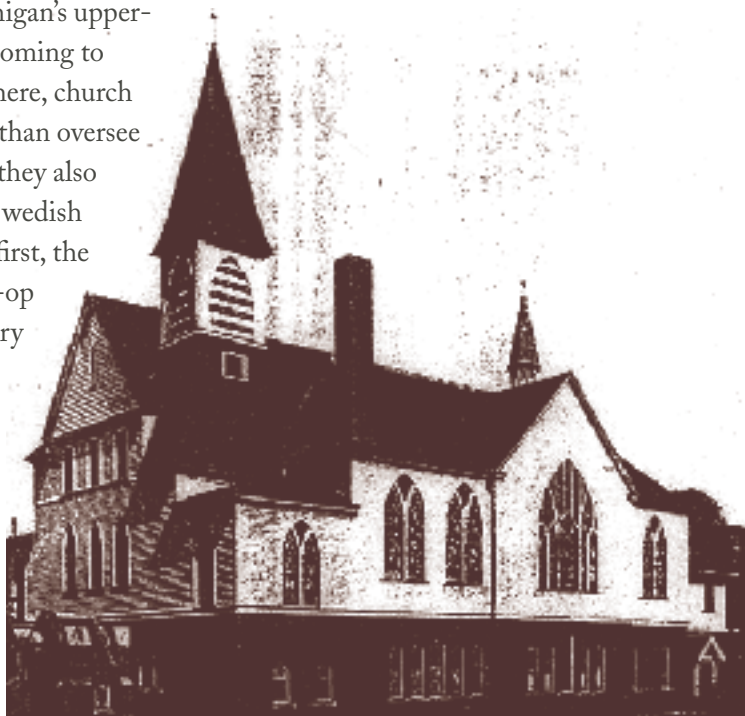
3 Quinsigamond Branch Library (#812 Millbury Street)

The Quinsigamond library played a major role in shaping village life, influenced by both Methodists and industrialists. This building, now on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1913, using land donated by American Steel & Wire and paid for with Andrew Carnegie's steel profits. Librarian Madeline Bell, interviewed at the time of its dedication, indicated the library "is not only used for exchange of books, but is a day nursery, a meeting place for young people, and a quiet reading room for the older men and women as well."

4 Quinsigamond School (#828 Millbury Street)

Rising numbers of children living in the Village required three new school buildings, built in 1890, 1896, and 1899. Taught the language and values expected in America, Swedish youth soon found it easy to fit in. Whether in school, in Protestant churches, or in the Republican Party, they shared many of the beliefs held by New England's older "middling sort." They supported government protections for skilled, propertied, and independent tradesmen, community control of public institutions, and prohibition of liquor and tobacco. This cultural affinity meant they were easily accepted in America. The Quinsigamond School was recently renovated after a community effort successfully campaigned to preserve the school rather than have it demolished.

The Methodists taught village children values through various library programs. A Boys Club taught them to debate about war, history, current events, and to hold business meetings. Nature hikes and birdhouse contests taught wildlife appreciation and handcraft skills appropriate for working class males. Girls' business meetings taught them how to listen and cooperate in the presentation of readings and storytelling, rather than how to debate. They learned to give fundraisers, picnics, and teas, in the spirit of middle class club women. Contests for the neatest, cleanest dolls taught them to be good mothers.



Methodists, born in the iron regions of Varmland, Sweden, stopped briefly to work in the mines of Michigan's upper peninsula before coming to Worcester. Once here, church trustees did more than oversee religious matters; they also developed many Swedish businesses. Their first, the First Swedish Co-op Store Co. (a grocery begun in 1883), proved to be a training ground for young entrepreneurs. Methodists soon were running businesses in fish, meat, dairy products, dry goods, baked goods, wood supplies, and electrical repair. They also ran boarding houses and were active in Worcester politics.

Walking Tour continued



The Methodists taught village children values through various library programs. A Boys Club taught them to debate about war, history, current events, and to hold business meetings. Nature hikes and birdhouse contests taught wildlife appreciation and handicraft skills appropriate for working-class males. Girls' business meetings taught them how to listen and cooperate in the presentation of readings and story-telling, rather than how to debate. They learned to give fundraisers, picnics, and teas, in the spirit of middle-class club women. Contests for the neatest, cleanest dolls taught them to be good mothers.

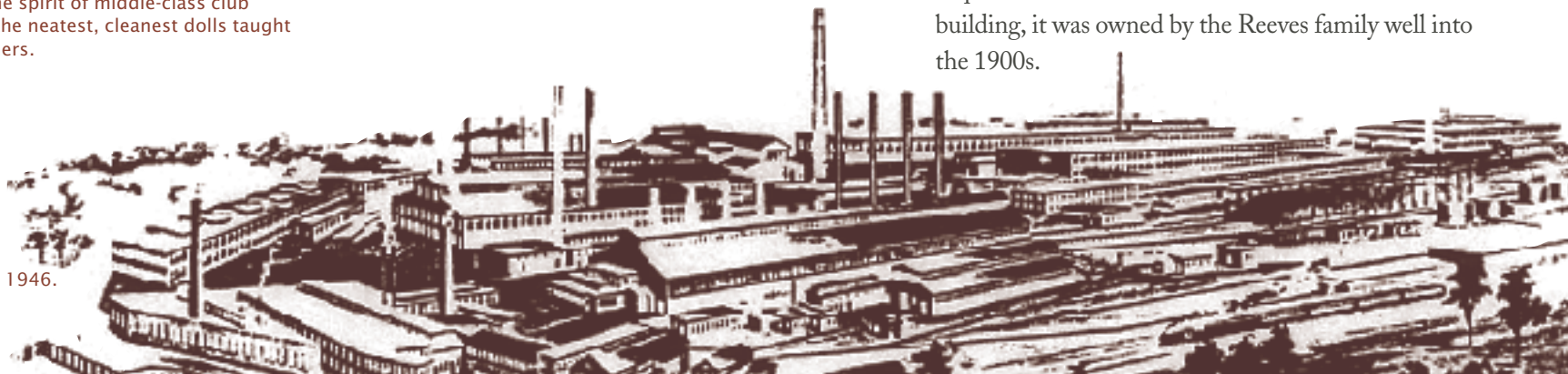
5 The Klondike (#854-858 Millbury Street)

For many Swedes, work was a way to obtain the independence found in property ownership. By 1900, 30.4 percent of the villagers owned homes, finding these “three deckers” an improvement over cramped tenements rented by earlier generations of working class families. Nonetheless, Swedish residents often shared their living spaces with other families – often relatives – until each could acquire funds to build their own. Owners also rented out empty space, applying the income to mortgages and retirement. Those living in the commercial district tended to live upstairs while running a business below. This structure, built between 1896 and 1900, housed the Quinsigamond Baking Company and later, Gustaf Gutkey's grocery.

6 George Reeves House (#894 Millbury Street)

Among the earliest homes in the Village, this Victorian vernacular structure was built between 1857 and 1862. It was owned by George Reeves, a skilled English craftsman who by 1880 was a foreman of Washburn & Moen. His position allowed him to acquire much land in the area. Now a commercial building, it was owned by the Reeves family well into the 1900s.

South works, 1946.



Walking Tour continued

7 Lutheran Emmanuel Church/ Community Center (Greenwood Street)

Unlike the revivalist churches, Swedish Lutherans were slow to start a congregation. They lacked support from “Yankee” counterparts, their formal religious services and selective membership failed to draw people, and their consumption of liquor and tobacco was unpopular among Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists alike. They therefore spent years meeting in the IOGT hall on the corner of Millbury and Greenwood Streets. Finally, in 1896, they organized the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Emmanuel Church, building this structure in 1898-1899. Its towering spire and Gothic revival design have made it a Village landmark. In recent years, with neighborhood support, it has become a community center.



The First Swedish Congregational Church built a Chapel for the villagers in 1891 on Greenwood Street. Between 1899 and 1901, Village Congregationalists built the Second Swedish Congregational Church (shown c 1910), beside the old Chapel on Greenwood Street.

8 Bethlehem Covenant Church (Greenwood and Halmstead)

Swedish Congregationalists enjoyed the support of native Protestants as well as shared with other “free churches” the desire for a Swedish community of respectable, hard-working, family centered, pious, and sober individuals. In the 1880s, Swedish Congregationalists began meeting in the village. In 1894, they became the Swedish Evangelical Congregational Church. In the 1920s, they severed their Congregational ties and joined the Covenant Church of America, renaming themselves the Bethlehem Covenant Church.

9 Berg/Dahlin Cottages (#841 & 843, #845 & 847 Millbury Street)

Unlike the many three deckers, there are a few “single family” workers’ homes left in the village. These Victorian double cottages were built between 1875 and 1878 and were privately owned from the start. At one time, #845 & 847 was occupied by Alfred Dahlin, once a “hammers man at the wire works” who rose to foreman in 10 years’ time. #841 & 843 was owned by the Berg family, starting with Gustaf C. Berg in 1875, down to 1995 when Herbert E. Berg sold his florist business at the site. His grandfather, Gustaf, was a wire die maker (called a sinker) for the Washburn & Moen Company.



Millbury Street, seen here c1890, was the center of a way of life and the site of numerous activities. The wire company sponsored free movies, the Brownie Athletic Club held minstrel and medicine shows, and Civic Club members gave a 4th of July Horribles Parade, marching down Millbury Street in the ugliest costumes possible. A village baseball team played “outsiders” from elsewhere in Worcester. Anyone could buy penny candy at the grocery, join a string band, or fish on Leary Pond.

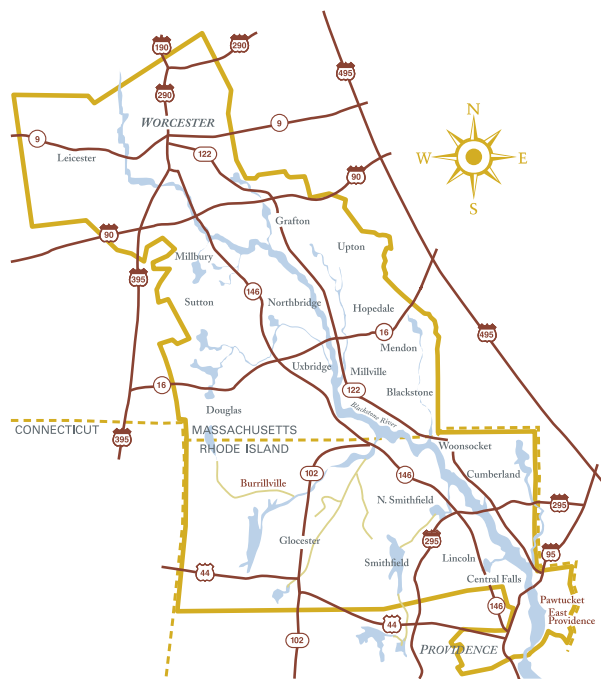
10 Quinsigamond Fire Station (#837 Main Street)

In an age of open fires, largely wooden buildings, and hot mill furnaces, fire stations played a critical role in the community. This handsome brick and sandstone building, now on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1891-1892. Yet life was not always work, even at the firehouse. Villagers still recall firemen giving the children rides on the fire wagon or hosing down Millbury Street in the winter so they could ice skate. In a neighborhood so self-contained, the lines of work, play, and civic responsibility regularly crossed.

Directions

From Rt. 146 north: Take exit 11 toward Quinsigamond Village. Turn left onto Millbury Street. Then left onto McKeon Road and left onto Blackstone River Road.

From Rt. 146 south: Take exit 12 and turn right onto McKeon Road and left onto Blackstone River Road.



Along the Way

- To see the campus of the College of the Holy Cross, built c. 1850-1875 in the Quinsigamond area, take McKeon Drive, across Millbury Street from the Teamsters parking lot, and follow it through Middle River Park to Riverside Street. Turn left on Riverside Street, left on Southbridge Street, under Hwy 290, and left again on College Street. The school is on your left.
- Worcester's Mechanics Hall Historic District is at 201-631 Main Street. Follow the directions above to Southbridge Street. Turn right on Southbridge, left on Madison, right on Main Street. The historic district is immediately ahead. Included are the Lincoln Block (built 1818-1830s), Mechanics Hall (1855-57), Worcester County Institution for Savings Bank (1851, 1906), City Hall and Common (1898), the Park Building (1914), and Worcester's Market Building (1914).
- To see a historic working mill museum, visit Slater Mill Historic Site in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Free parking and restrooms. For hours of operations and admission prices, please visit www.slatermill.org or call 401-725-8636.
- Be sure to visit the Blackstone River & Canal Heritage State Park and River Bend Farm Visitor Center – just 15 miles away at 287 Oak Street in historic Uxbridge, MA. Canal tow path walk, canoe launch sites, hiking trails, free maps,

brochures, interpretive tours, and exhibits with videos, and more. Free parking and admission. Open seven days. 508-278-7604.

- The Worcester Historical Museum, located at 30 Elm Street, offers exhibits, library, and a museum shop. Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m.-4 p.m. For more information, call 508-753-8278.
- For information on events, restaurants and lodging in Worcester, call the Worcester Convention and Visitors Bureau at 508-753-2920.

Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission in 1986, recognizing the national significance of the region between Providence, RI and Worcester, MA—the Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor is an affiliated area of the National Park Service.



This brochure was developed under the direction of The Rhode Island Historical Society in partnership with the Heritage Corridor Commission.

Special thanks to Worcester Historical Museum.