



1858



1871

Hotel Hill

Main Road

Lees Wharf

WALKING TOUR OF WESTPORT POINT

“The Point” was an active port and busy village well before the town of Westport was incorporated in 1787. This peninsula between the East (Noquochoke) and West (Acoaxet) branches of the Westport River was a Native American summer location for farming and fishing. Europeans began living here about 1700, and it became an ideal site for shipping, privateering, and the new industry of whaling with its associated activities of coopering, shipbuilding, and blacksmithing. By 1800 there were 15 houses, new wharves, artisan shops, general stores, a windmill, and a distillery.

In the 1840s, the height of whaling, Main Road boasted new Greek Revival homes of retired captains, agents, and ship owners. With the decline of the whaling industry after the Civil War, the Point began to be recognized as a desirable summer vacation spot which provided tourist income for farmers, fishermen, boat builders, inn keepers, and others. By 1914 it was a true village with seventy-five houses, a school, the Methodist church and the cemetery, three stores, the wharves, and a post office. The Point has preserved its 19th century appearance, thanks in part to its designation as a Historic District in 1973.

Begin your tour at the intersection of Hotel Hill and Main Road. Parking is limited there, so you might want to drive 0.2 miles further south and park in front of the church, or along Drift Road by the cemetery. You can also park at the end of Main Road and do the tour in reverse order.



1856 MAIN ROAD: HOTEL WESTPORT (1889)

The house at the northeast corner of the intersection was the Hotel Westport, catering to the summer visitors who started coming to the Point after the Civil War to enjoy the fresh air, boating, fishing and swimming. The hotel burned in 1915, and what you see today is a private home built on what remained of the hotel after the fire.



1871 MAIN ROAD: KATHERINE HALL HOME AND LIBRARY

The charming little cottage set behind the main house was used as a children's library. Founded by Katherine Hall in the 1920s, the library was open only on Saturdays and had benches for the children to sit and read. They could take books out on the honor system.



1874 MAIN ROAD: HELEN ELLIS HOME

This Cape-style house might date to 1760, making it one of the oldest on the Point. It was the home of Helen Ellis (1889-1978), a noted artist, woodcarver, and teacher, as well as a philanthropist whose Helen Ellis Charitable Trust has provided support for many cultural programs in Westport.



1878 MAIN ROAD: MARJORIE ROBB – TITANIC SURVIVOR

This 1825 Cape (known as the "Dune House") was probably transported from the dunes at Horseneck Beach. For much of the 20th century it was owned by Basil D. Hall, president of the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Its most famous resident was Marjorie Newell Robb (1889-1992), whose status as one of the last survivors of the Titanic disaster overshadowed her career as a music teacher and founder of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra.



1881 MAIN ROAD (C. 1850)

This house, in the Victorian Eclectic or Gothic Revival style, is one of the most unusual buildings at the Point.



1886 MAIN ROAD: POINT SCHOOLHOUSE

The Point School opened in 1904 and operated until 1972. At one point it had eight grades—all in two rooms. But it was innovative for its time, with adjustable desks and chairs, slate blackboards, and window curtains. The cement floor of the basement provided a place for children to play on rainy days. In 1979 the schoolhouse was converted to a single family home.



1912 MAIN ROAD: METHODIST CHURCH

The Gothic style Westport Point Methodist Church was erected in 1884. The congregation's original church (1832) was north of the present location. The second one was located across Drift Road in what is now the cemetery. Known for its superb acoustics, the church hosts the Concerts at the Point chamber music series.





WESTPORT POINT CEMETERY

This land was once the site of a windmill, as well as the second Methodist church before the present one was built across the street. The cemetery has the appearance of a colonial-era graveyard, but is relatively new (c. 1800). Look for the old style gravestone of Nicholas Underwood (d. 1800) close to the street.

CARTER'S WAY

Stop for a moment to admire the view of the harbor, one of the best vistas in Westport. Across the water is the part of town known as Acoaxet, and to the south (your left) is the harbor mouth leading to Buzzards Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.



1933 MAIN ROAD: GEORGE BRIGHTMAN HOUSE (C.1790)

George Brightman built several houses at the Point. Over the years this one has been transformed into a lovely mix of architectural styles, with aspects of Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival.



1950 MAIN ROAD: CAPTAIN SOWLE HOUSE (1840)

Edward G. Sowle was the master of numerous whaling voyages from Westport Point in the 1840s and 50s. This Greek Revival house was later owned by Andrew Hicks (1799-1895), the most prominent whaling agent in Westport and owner of nine whaling vessels. His father, Captain Barney Hicks, was a Revolutionary War hero—but also engaged in the slave trade.



1954 MAIN ROAD (MACOMBER-BROWNELL)

This eclectic Greek Revival, built in 1841, is adorned by a delicate widow's walk on the roof. From the 1850s to about 1900 it was owned in by H. H. Brownell, who had been a grocer but—like many seeking their fortune—was lured to California by the Gold Rush. He returned to work as a carriage maker in New Bedford.

1963 MAIN ROAD: SITE OF GIFFORD'S STORE

Charles H. Gifford opened a store across from the Point Market. Competition was personal and fierce: if you shopped in one, you didn't set foot in the other. Gifford was the town treasurer in the 1920s, and apparently invested some of the town's money in a shipment of liquor during Prohibition. After the ship sank, his store mysteriously burned down; many believed Gifford had set fire to his store to destroy the town tax records he kept there. This is one of many stories about rum running in Westport during the Prohibition Era.

1968 MAIN ROAD: POINT MARKET

Brothers Albert and Alfred Tripp opened their general store in 1879. The building originally had separate entrances for men and women, apparently leading to the section of the store that would most interest them. The store served the village as a market and gathering place until about 2000, and more recently was converted to a law office. The Tripp brothers also ran a livery business, transporting people and goods; the building in back on the right side was the livery stable.





1973 MAIN ROAD: HAMMOND HOUSE AND STORE (1862)

Sarah Hammond was deeded this property for “her sole and separate use, free from the interference and control of her husband.” Whatever the reasons behind that, the house included a store and post office. The small building in front of the house to the south was also a store and post office, with a gas pump in front. Local lore has it that Eleanor Roosevelt stopped in when—on her way to meet up with Franklin, who was staying with his advisor Louis Howe at Horseneck—she noticed the blue eagle symbol of the NRA, a signature program of FDR’s New Deal. The blue eagle part is unlikely: Franklin’s visits to Westport occurred before he was president, and therefore before programs like the NRA. But Eleanor did come to Westport!



1986 MAIN ROAD: SITE OF POINT SCHOOL

In the early 19th century, Westport had twenty school districts, due to the size of the town (at 65 square miles, it is still one of the largest towns in the state). The school for the Westport Point district was located here.



1991 MAIN ROAD: VALENTINE HOUSE (1868)

This stunning Second Empire house with Italianate features was built for New York banker William Valentine in 1870. Around 1900 it was purchased by Henry Sheldon who had big plans for developing the Point, including a railroad to Horseneck Beach. Sheldon lost a fortune in the 1929 Crash and most of his plans never materialized. There is no other house on the Point like it. Note the matching carriage house across the driveway.



1998 MAIN ROAD: CAPTAIN CHARLES BALL HOUSE (C. 1840)

If you look up “Greek Revival” in an architecture textbook, this is what you would see. In the 1830s and 40s, whaling captains like Charles Ball built houses in the latest Greek Revival style to display their wealth and status. Later in the nineteenth century the house was owned by the painter and poet Mercy Etta Baker. She could trace her ancestry to Christopher Gifford, who in 1699 had purchased the entire Point from Daniel Wilcox who had befriended the Acoaxet Wampanoags during King Philip’s War.



2001 MAIN ROAD: CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER DAVIS HOUSE

This c. 1815 house was originally a “half house,” consisting of the door and the two window bays to the right. In 1818, on a voyage to Maine for pine flooring for the house, Captain Davis and another Westport captain, Benjamin Hicks, were lost at sea in a storm. The house passed to Davis’s son Alfred, who had an eventful life as a whaling captain, surviving a mutiny on one voyage and near capture by cannibals on another. In 2000 the house was completed with the addition of the two bays on the left side.



2002 MAIN ROAD (C. 1712/1810)

This house was built for Christopher Gifford III, whose ancestors had purchased most of the land at the Point in 1699. Although the house was built in 1810, remnants of a previous house can be dated to about 1712. Christopher Gifford I ran a toll ferry from the end of the Point across the river to Horseneck Beach.



2018 MAIN ROAD: CAPTAIN THOMAS MAYHEW HOUSE (C. 1827)

This Federal style house was built for Thomas Mayhew, a successful sea captain who also owned several whaling vessels at Westport Point. The most striking feature of the house is the cupola which provides a clear view of the ocean.



2023 MAIN ROAD: GIDEON DAVIS, JR. HOUSE

This house was built on property taken from Christopher Gifford II to pay his bill to physician John Almy. Gideon Davis, Jr., built the house in 1827. Davis was a very successful whaling agent and partner of A. H. Cory in the store at the end of the street. Later when the house was owned by Isaac Palmer the living room was a public tavern. Another owner, George Manchester, was a whaling captain who was master of the Westport whaler *Kate Cory*. He was fortunate not to be on her 1862 voyage when she became a casualty of the Civil War.



2029 MAIN ROAD: KATE CORY GRINNELL HOUSE (C. 1845)

The Corys were successful agents, ship owners, and merchants who lived further down Main Road at number 2039. One of their whaling vessels, the *Kate Cory*, was captured and burned by the Confederate commerce raider *Alabama* during the Civil War. The ship had been named for Alexander's young daughter Kate, who later lived in this modified Greek Revival house with her husband Philip Grinnell.



2039 MAIN ROAD: CORY HOUSE

Isaac Cory escaped to Westport from Portsmouth, RI during the Revolution (he was probably engaged in privateering against British merchant ships). Three generations of Corys—Isaac (1746-1830), Isaac, Jr. (1775-1855), and Alexander Hamilton Cory (1815-1897)—were the leading merchants at the Point, as well as shipbuilders and whaling agents. This house was also a store until the Cory Store (2056 Main Road) was built in the 1820s.



2041 MAIN ROAD: STEPHEN DAVIS HOUSE (C. 1770)

Stephen Davis, a ship carpenter, built this house in 1770. Later it was owned by several generations of the Howland family, who were well-known coopers, providing barrels for the whaling and coasting trade at the Point. This is probably the least-modified historic house at the Point—still heated only by the central fireplace.



2044 MAIN ROAD: LEMUEL BAILEY DOUBLE HOUSE (1777)

This rare gambrel-style house was originally a double house, sold to two separate mariners. Later it was owned by the Brightman family of ship carpenters who had a shop in the back. One colorful owner was John Kenney who worked on a barge delivering coal to the Point. In exchange for coal, owner John Brightman let Kenney stay in a room upstairs. Kenny saved enough to buy the house from Brightman's granddaughter in 1935. A local character, with an odd walk due to frostbitten amputated toes, he scraped out a living knitting nets, tending the Point draw bridge, washing dishes, and selling "short" (under legal size) lobsters. Old timers remember Kenney's attempt to save his house in the 1938 hurricane by sweeping the water away with a broom.



2048 MAIN ROAD: BENJAMIN DAVIS HOUSE

This house was built by house carpenter George Brightman in 1775, the year the American Revolution started. He sold the house to Benjamin Davis who, with his brother William, operated a distillery. The land between the house and the Inn was known as the "Still House lot." Rum was an important product in Westport's extensive maritime trade—as well as for local consumption.



2056 MAIN ROAD: CORY STORE (1840)

The Cory family operated a chandlery (supplying the local ships) in the 1820s, and enlarged it in 1840 to its current appearance. The building also housed the customs house, post office, a tailor's shop, and a sail loft on the top floor. It is currently a Bed & Breakfast called The Paquachuck Inn.

2057 MAIN ROAD: LEACH'S STORE (1939)

This now defunct store was once the thriving business of George "Shorty" Leach. Shorty sold and repaired Evinrude outboards, provided bait, and rented boats and moorings. In the 1954 hurricane, the building floated across the street and into the river, but was later recovered. In the 19th century this lot was the site of the Brightman lumber yard, which had a wind-powered sawmill.



SITE OF LAURA'S RESTAURANT

The open space just south of the Paquachuck Inn was once the site of Laura's Restaurant, a popular watering hole. Laura's is a reminder of the three devastating hurricanes that struck Westport between 1938 and 1954. In late August 1954, Hurricane Carol tore the restaurant from its foundation and into the river. The bartender and a waitress were still inside, and had to be rescued. It is said that some locals were disappointed in the rescue, hoping that their bar tabs would go down with the building. The restaurant was salvaged and is now part of a house on Drift Road.



MARINERS' MEMORIAL

A memorial to Westport sailors lost at sea was erected by the Westport Fishermen's Association in 1996. The first entry remembers the two Westport mariners who sailed to Maine to get wood to finish the house at 2001 Main Road. The list continues into recent years, reminding us of the perils of a life at sea. Just behind the memorial stone is a granite post that, some say, ships were tied to. It's possible, as the docks once extended further north than they do now. It's the only explanation we have!



LEES WHARF (C. 1830)

Originally built around 1830 by Thomas Mayhew, agent for many of Westport's whaling vessels in the nineteenth century, the wharf became a depot for fish, coal, grain, and oil. In 1929 it passed into the hands of the Lees family, who operated a market for fish (and most everything else). The removal of the old wooden bridge to Horseneck in 1963 ended the busy traffic at the Point, and most of the retail businesses eventually closed. But some traditions carry on: Lees Wharf is now the home of Riptide Oysters.



TOWN DOCKS

In addition to Lees Wharf there are two wharves for commercial vessels. Whaling and swordfishing may be long gone, but Westport Point is still an active port for fishing and lobstering, as well as for hundreds of pleasure craft.

We hope you have enjoyed your tour of the Historic District of Westport Point!

This walking tour was created by the Westport Historical Society, 25 Drift Road, Westport MA 02790. www.wpthistory.org • 508 636 6011