

# History of the Community

## Early Colonial History / Establishment of West Newbury

West Newbury shares its early history with neighboring Newburyport and Newbury. All three communities were originally part of the (then) much larger Town of Newbury.

Roughly 100 settlers from Wiltshire, England settled Newbury in 1635. This group of settlers arrived in Boston in May of 1634 and spent their initial winter in Agawam (Ipswich) before boating north to their new home on the Parker River. House and agricultural lots were allotted during that first summer (1635). "Prudential Men" (later known as Selectmen) were elected to attend to the matters of the Town, and other Town's people were appointed to offices such as the "cullers of staves" and "informers of deer".

In 1642 some of the land in the Newbury "Upper Commons" (now West Newbury) was allotted to the freeholders of Newbury. These lots were originally used as wood lots and pastures, but houses soon began to appear on them. In 1686 the remainder of the Upper Commons was divided. After a long period of petitioning both the Town of Newbury and the State, the residents of the Upper Commons were allowed to split from Newbury and incorporate their own Town. The Town of Parsons, renamed West Newbury one year later, was established in 1819.

## Manufacturing

In times past, the Town supported a variety of manufacturing enterprises. West Newbury was the birthplace of the comb industry, which began in the mid-1700's; at one time there were 30 comb shops in Town. Shoe making, carriage building, leather tanning, and brick making were also important at various times. The Ruddock Shoe Factory employed 250 people in the mid to late 1800's. These businesses were transitory for a variety of reasons: some (including the Ruddock factory) were destroyed by fire, others (such as the comb shops) died out when local manufacturing practices became obsolete. While West Newbury's experience with manufacturing was somewhat fleeting, agriculture has been a constant for the Town, and was, until recently, the Town's primary "industry".

## Agriculture

A look at West Newbury's history and location helps explain why agricultural has been so important to the community. The area that became West Newbury was initially parceled out to Newbury landholders for use as agricultural fields and woodlots. Newbury commerce was centered in the port area that later became Newburyport when it separated from agrarian Newbury in 1762.

West Newbury has never played the role of a major crossroads, and in recent years it has been somewhat insulated from the direct impacts of I-95 and I-495. The industrial enterprises that were begun in the mid 1800's failed for a variety of reasons, leaving the Town's citizens to rely on the land for their livelihoods. West Newbury remained primarily a farming community until

after World War II. The Town's agrarian tradition can be seen today in its actively tended hay fields, apple orchards, cultivated lands, Christmas tree farms, and greenhouses.

### **Settlement Patterns**

Settlement patterns dating from the 1600's and 1700's have defined West Newbury's present-day layout. The following map of the "West Parish" (Figure 3-1) dates from 1729 and shows striking similarities to today's West Newbury. With the exception of modern subdivisions, West Newbury's present road system was well-established by the early 1700's. As the map indicates, homes were concentrated along the Bradford Road (now Main Street/Route 113) and interspersed fairly evenly along the other Town roads. It appears that West Newbury has never had a distinct Town center. The historic pattern of homes and businesses being distributed evenly along the length of the old Bradford Road has led to the current configuration, in which various buildings and businesses are stretched along Main Street.

**Excerpted From:** *West Newbury Open Space Plan*