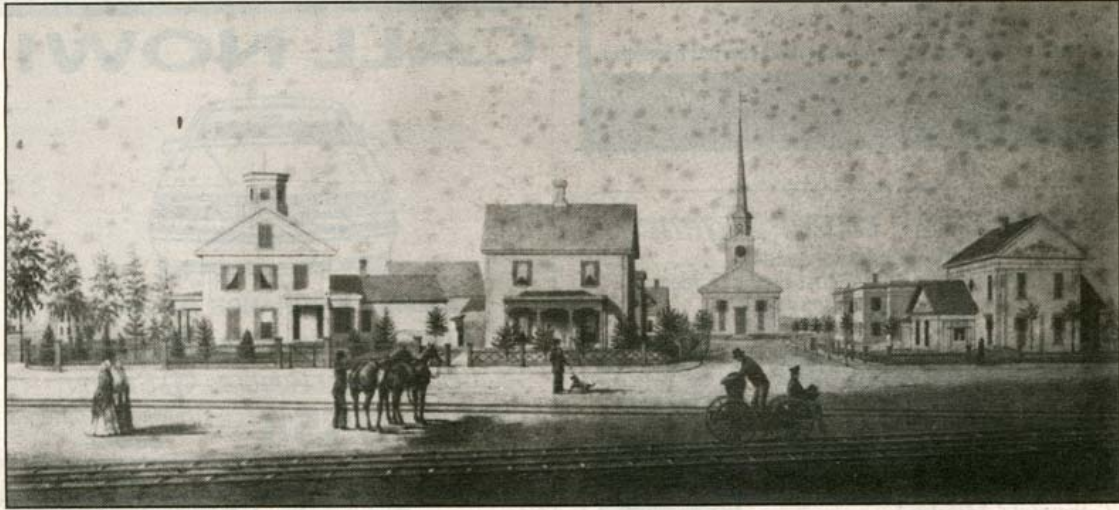


A 19th century planned neighborhood



by Anthony Mitchell Sammarco

Port Norfolk in Dorchester is today separated from the rest of the town by a wide swathe of the Southeast Expressway. Once adjacent to Neponset, it is both visually and pedestrian separated from the area, but when it was developed, it was laid out as a planned neighborhood for Dorchester's increasing population.

HISTORY

Luther Briggs, Jr. (1822-1905) was commissioned by Edward King, president of the Neponset Wharf Company (for whom King Street and King Square, the Junction of Adams and Gibson Streets, was named) to survey and lay out new streets in the area formerly known as Pine Neck. Pine Neck, which remained undeveloped for over two

centuries after Dorchester was settled in 1630, had a slight knoll in the center that was covered with conifers. The area was renamed Port Norfolk, in relation to the waterfront and creek, and the fact that Dorchester was then a part of Norfolk County. Briggs laid out the new streets, including Walnut Street, which he graded with 278 loads of gravel, and in many instances built residences for new residents of Dorchester. The accompanying photograph is of a lithograph (circa 1849) drawn by Tappan and Bradford, a noted lithography studio in Boston.

Briggs was an able surveyor and architect, and the nephew of the noted Boston architect Alexander Parris with whom he worked as a draftsman from 1839 to 1842 who built Quincy Market at Dock Square, St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Tremont Street and numerous other buildings. Briggs later became associated with Gridley J. Fox Bryant

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in 1842 an architectural partnership that lasted two years when Briggs established an independent architectural practice. Later building his own residence on Walnut Street in Port Norfolk, he would remain in the neighborhood until his death in 1905.

In the center is the Greek Revival Trinity, Congregational Church, built in 1847 with Walnut Street extending to Rice Street (on the left, originally called Wood Street Court) and Wood (now Woodworth) Street on the right. Remarkably, though the church does not survive, the three houses do and give a major example of how Port Norfolk was envisioned in the mid nineteenth century. On the far left is the Dr. Henry Blanchard House at 5 Rice Street, a late Greek Revival house with a cupola surmounting the roof, adjacent is the Isaac Stetson House, which was more Italianate in design with cast iron stair rails on its stairs, and on the right the home of architect

Charles Austin Wood, later the home of Thomas French Temple, another Greek Revival house. The fact that Luther Briggs, Jr. designed these houses after Port Norfolk was laid out in 1845, and the fact that though they have been changed and resided, they remarkably survive one-hundred and-fifty years later.

Pictured in the foreground are the tracks of the Old Colony Railroad, which was founded by Nathan Carmth in 1844 and was extended from Boston to South Shore towns and opened in the fall of 1845, with a commuter station, known as Neponset Station, at Port Norfolk. Two men can be seen on a "hand-pumper," which allowed the flatcar to use the railroad tracks, but it had to be operated by manpower to move along the tracks. Daily life at Port Norfolk can be seen with two women near Taylor Street deep in conversation on the left, a man standing with two horses in the center and a man walking his dog. The young trees, probably planted in 1845, were just saplings, and would eventually provide the desired summer shade.

By popular demand, Anthony Mitchell Sammarco's award-winning columns have returned to the Dorchester Community News on a regular basis. Mr. Sammarco's columns have graced the pages of DCN for over 10 years.