

MANSFIELD MEMORIES: Do you know your neighborhoods?



By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco

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If you've ever spent a day exploring the North End, checking out the South End, or walking through Back Bay, you might think you spent the day in Boston. But you wouldn't even have to leave Mansfield to visit those places. But do today's Mansfield residents know the town's traditional neighborhoods? Perhaps this is just our opinion, but here are some of the best-known, largest, or most prominent Mansfield neighborhoods, as they have been known for generations. Here we go.

Downtown: North Main Street, from the South Common to the North Common, is undoubtedly Downtown. Some refer to the area between North Main Street, Chauncy Street, Copeland Drive and West Street to also be downtown. On this point we would agree.

East Mansfield and West Mansfield: In our humble opinion, this point is beyond debate. It has always been "East Mansfield" and "West Mansfield." There has been a trend in recent years to refer to them as the "East Side" and the "West Side." We traditionalists disagree. Those names are far too "New York" for our taste. But the real debate, which has raged for years, is "which one is better, East or West Mansfield?" Now that is controversial, and since the Historical Society is downtown, we will stay away from that one.

So where do East and West Mansfield begin? We would claim that East Mansfield starts where the new Public Safety building is being built, and anything from there to Easton is East Mansfield. But the heart of East Mansfield is where East and Mill streets meet, by the East Mansfield Common. And by today's landmarks, West Mansfield is anything west of Route 140, with the heart of West Mansfield being by the Old Country Store.

Sidebar on East Mansfield: Is the Franklin/Winter Street area East Mansfield? A century ago that area was known as "Whiteville," after the White family that lived there. But even then, newspaper reports referred to that area as part of East Mansfield, so we would say the answer is yes. We will have more on Whiteville another time.

While we reject those aforementioned New York names, we now return to the Mansfield neighborhoods that sound like Boston: the North End, the South End, and Back Bay.

The North End: This is the North Main Street area north of Chauncy Street (such as North Main, County and Angell streets). Some might include the "other side of the tracks" too, like Fuller Place and Kingman Avenue. In another strange parallel to Boston, in the early 20th century the North End was where most of Mansfield's Italian immigrants settled.

The South End: This is South Main Street from the South Common to Hall Street. The South End includes the shorter streets that run off of South Main, like the Benefit Street neighborhood or the "ABC Streets," Aspen, Beech and Chestnut.

Back Bay: This is a distinctive, well-known neighborhood, but one doesn't hear the name as much anymore, so let's bring it back. Back Bay is the maze of streets that run between North Main, Chauncy, Hope, and East Streets. So the main streets that run East/West through Back Bay are Park, Court, Shawmut Ave., Samoset Ave., Church, Cottage and Pleasant streets. North/South streets include Chilson Ave., Brook, Rock, Hodges and Columbus streets.

There were other, smaller neighborhoods too, but these are the main ones. We will tell you more about other neighborhoods in a future column.

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