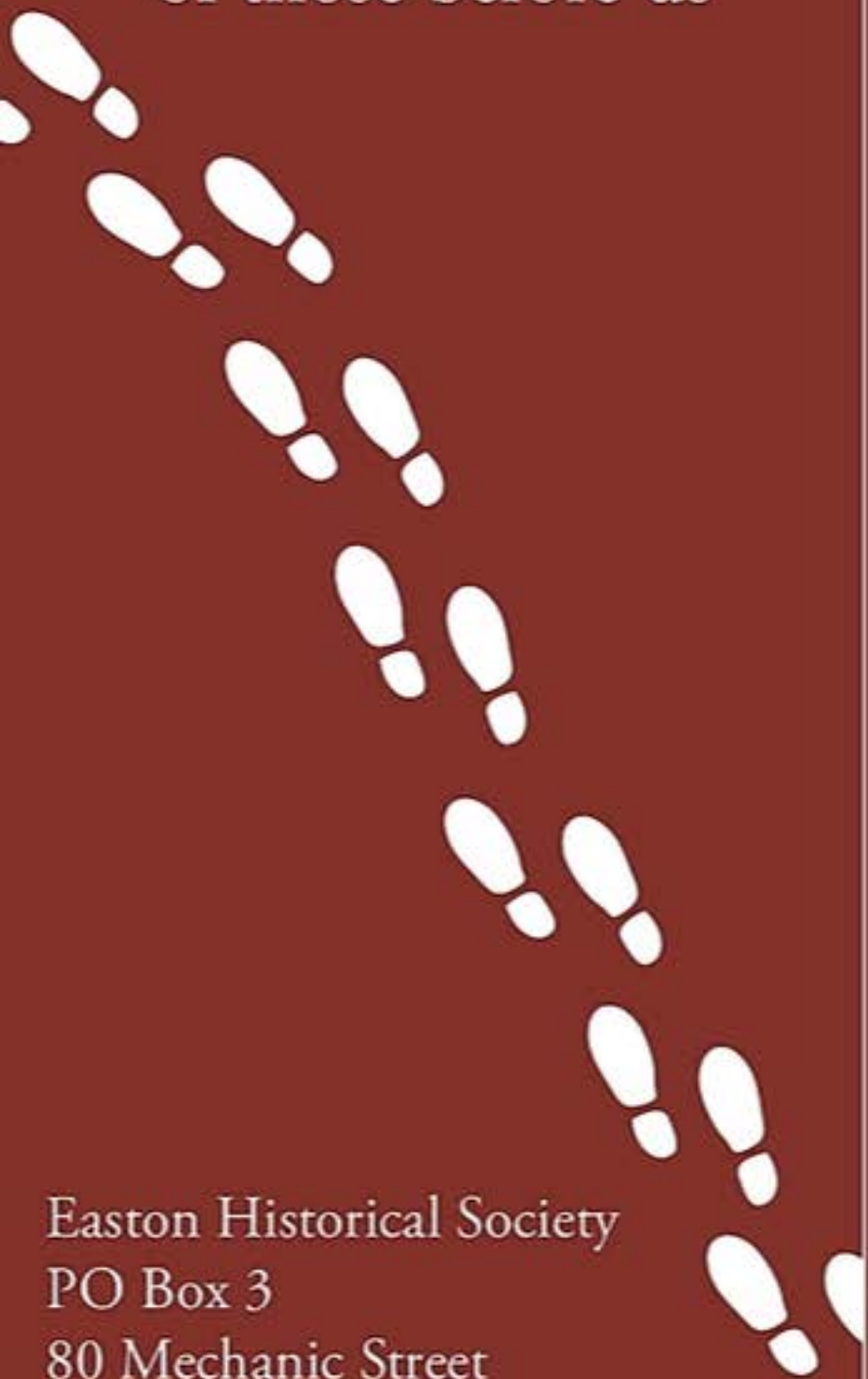


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With Thanks To  
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## A Walking Tour of the Historic Village of North Easton



Enjoy this historic walk!

This brochure provided by the  
Easton Historical Society



# A short history of the village and the Ames Family

North Easton Village is a nationally important 19th century industrial village that grew around the historic Ames Shovel Shops. Here are a few key facts to start your tour:

- The buildings in the village reflect a patchwork of eras. The earliest date from the 18th century, prior to the advent of the Ames Shovel Company. Later waves of growth provided rental homes and stores for the expanding work force at the shovel shops, an informational process that just happened. Before the Civil War, successful workers began to add their own private homes to the mix. Ultimately, prompted by the move of the shovel shops to their current location in 1852, a more cohesive order of town planning began to emerge.

- In 1803 Oliver Ames bought a mill for his growing shovel business at the east end of what is now Shovel Shop Pond. Notwithstanding a near bankruptcy the company thrived. In

1843 he brought his sons Oakes and Oliver, Jr. into the business as partners. They ran the company, which was renamed O. Ames and Sons, for the next 20 years. This era saw the company expand worker housing, sponsor the construction of churches and schools, and build the first large family homes.

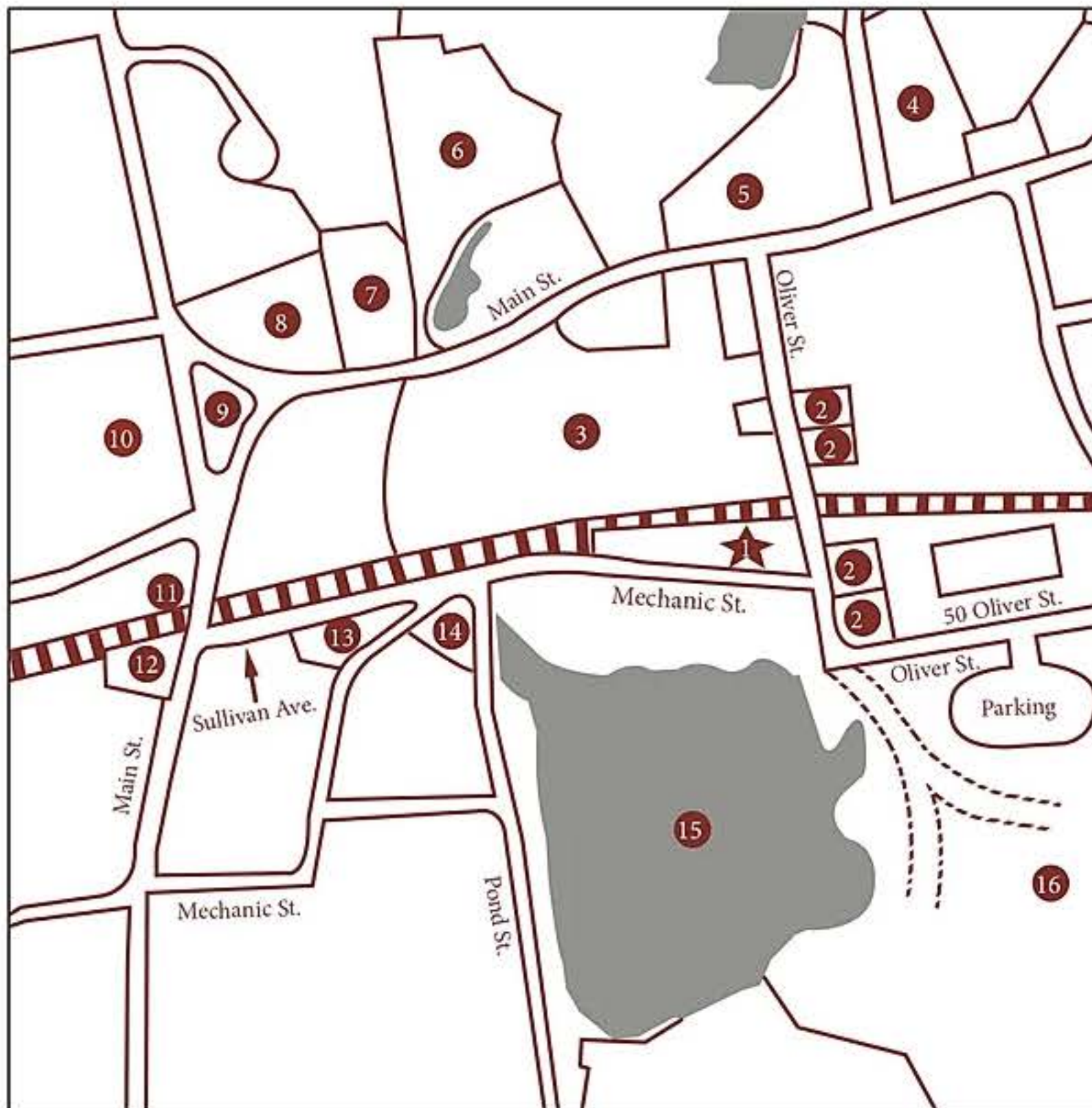
- In 1863 at the death of Old Oliver, the brothers brought their sons, Oakes' sons, Oakes Angier and Oliver II (Governor Ames), and Oliver's son Frederick, into the business. In 1865 President Lincoln drew their fathers into the construction of the transcontinental railroad. The sons then assumed operating control of the company. This era, which many would consider the apogee of the company's success, lasted until Oakes Angier's death in 1899. In 1879, the company manufactured **60% of the world's shovels**. During this time, the H. H. Richardson buildings, the Olmsted "Rockery," the first Oliver Ames High School, and Unity Church were built. These finally cre-

ated a focal point for the village.

- With the 1899 advent of Hobart Ames as Shovel Company President, the fourth generation became the family's leaders. This remained so until the death of John S. Ames, Sr. in 1959. During this time, Frothingham Park, a gymnasium for the high school, an elementary school, a fire station, and two more family homes were built in North Easton. All the buildings are still standing today. After a long period of decline for the shovel shops, they closed in the early 1950s. With the closing of the shops, development in Easton moved away from the village, thus preserving it as it was for future generations.

## **Let us know what you think!**

The Easton Historical Society would greatly appreciate your comments and considerations about this brochure



### 9) The Rockery

(Main Street)

The F. L. Olmsted designed Rockery is located just southeast of Oakes Ames Memorial Hall. It was built for Oliver Ames and Sons Corporation in 1883. The Rockery was conceived of as a combination of Civil War Memorial, a public square and promenade. In 1970 it was deeded to the town. It is understood that Olmsted was never happy with the outcome of his design. Today it receives oversight from the Easton Historical Commission and care from the Easton Garden Club and the Friends of Easton's Public Gardens.

### 10) 1895 Oliver Ames High School

(8 Lincoln Street)

The yellow brick high school just south of the Rockery was given by Governor Ames, son of Oakes Ames. It was dedicated in 1896 just after the Governor's death. Following his death, his wife, Anna C. Ames, had a gymnasium built to the west, across Barrows Street, which was used for physical education and band activities. While the school moved from this building in 1957, the name has been continued at its other locations. This original high school building was used as an educational facility until 1997. Douglas A. King restored the building and converted it to rental apartments in 2003.

### 11) The Torrey House

(91 Main Street)

Gurdon Stone built the Torrey House sometime between 1830 and 1835 for Colonel John Torrey. John Torrey married the sister of Evelina Gilmore Ames. Evelina and her husband Oakes were frequent visitors to this house. Torrey's son Charles died at Andersonville Prison in 1864. After the death of John Torrey, also in 1864, the house passed to the Ames family. It was used for worker housing well into the 20th century. The building is still used today for residences and businesses.

### 12) Ripley's Store

(101 Main Street)

Built about 1859 by Samuel B. Ripley, this building featured stores on the first floor and Ripley's Hall upstairs. The hall hosted spiritualist meetings and was later used temporarily by both the Methodists and the Adventists. John J. McCarthy operated a livery stable in the rear of the building beginning in 1881 and owned a grocery store in the original building with his brother-in-law Daniel Dineen. Despite the shovel company running its own store, it was never a monopoly as in true company towns. This store and a number of independent merchants flourished along Main Street.

# Points of interest on the tour

## 1) Old Colony Railroad Station

(H.H. Richardson) (80 Mechanic Street)

The railroad station was commissioned by F. L. Ames in 1881. Mr. Ames spent much of his time in Boston and used the train often. It was given to the Old Colony Railroad upon its completion in 1882. The station was used until the closing of the line in 1959. In 1969 it was purchased by Mr. William A. Parker, Mr. John S. Ames, Jr., Mr. David Ames, and Senator Oliver F. Ames and donated to the Easton Historical Society. Over the years, the Society has done many renovations. The Society is open the second Sunday of every month from 1-5 PM and when the curator is present or by appointment.

## 2) Oliver Street Tenements

(10-12, 14-16, 26-28, 30-32 Oliver Street)

When the first shovel shops on the east side of Shovel Shop Pond burned in 1852, the company constructed a long wooden shop on that site to temporarily house its manufacturing operations. While the new stone shops were being built, the company could still meet the exploding demand for shovels from gold miners and railroad builders. When the Long Shop was completed, the wooden building was cut into four sections and dragged across the frozen pond and re-erected as company housing.

## 3) The Oliver Ames and Sons Shovel Shops

(50 Main Street)

The first building of the Stone Shops Complex was the Long Shop which dates from 1852 when the brothers Oakes and Oliver Ames, Jr. ran the company. It continued in operation until the company closed its Easton plant in 1952. Other shovel shop buildings followed into the 20th century. All survive except for the most recently constructed in the late 1920's. The Shovel Shops have been converted into residential apartments by Beacon Communities.

## 4) Unity Church

(9 Main Street)

Unity Church was built in 1875 for Oliver Ames, Jr. who commissioned his nephew John Ames Mitchell to design it. Services for Unitarians have been conducted here since its construction, and the Ames family of Easton have always been members. As one enters the church, a beautiful oak screen and pulpit are straight ahead. They were donated by the family of Frederick L. Ames, son of the donor of the church. The screen and pulpit were designed by Henry Vaughan and carved by J. Kirchmayer. Above the screen are twenty angels holding musical instruments. Two angels

with trumpets are above the pulpit. The church also has two large magnificent John LaFarge stained glass windows.

## 5) "Unity Close"

(23 Main Street)

"Unity Close" was designed and built for Oliver Ames, Jr. in 1862 by architect George Snell. It was built just before he and his brother Oakes turned their energies to the transcontinental railroad. The house was occupied by an Ames family member until the death of Elise Ames Parker in 1979. One of the main features of the property is the Fletcher Steele Garden. The house and gardens were beautifully restored by James Carlino and J. Peter Simpson.

## 6) "Queset" and Gardens

(51 Main Street)

"Queset", an Andrew Jackson Downing design, was built in 1854 for Oakes Angier Ames, some years before he became president of the shovel company. Oakes Angier had his cousin John Ames Mitchell enlarge it in 1875. Oakes Angier's son Broadway producer Winthrop expanded the F. L. Olmsted designed gardens; he used them to stage summer productions with local and Broadway actors. "Queset" is now part of the Ames Free Library campus and is the Learning Commons.

## 7) Ames Free Library

(H.H. Richardson) (53 Main Street)

The library was built in 1877-79 from a bequest of funds under the will of Oliver Ames, Jr. and supplemented by a large donation from his son Frederick. It was expanded in 1931 to include a children's wing with a gift from Mrs. Fanny Ames in memory of her husband William Hadwen Ames, the elder son of Governor Ames. The library's reading room has a Stanford White fireplace with an Augustus St. Gaudens medallion above it. The building is considered one of the finest small libraries done by H.H. Richardson. The library program was recently recognized as one of the best in the country for a library of its size.

## 8) Oakes Ames Memorial Hall

(H.H. Richardson) (3 Barrows Street)

The emblem of the Town, the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall was given to Easton by the children of Oakes Ames including Oakes Angier Ames and Governor Oliver Ames. In 1885 it was ranked as the 10th best building in the country by the leading architectural journal of the day. It is actively used today for community and private events and functions.

## 13) Old Fire Station

(9 Sullivan Avenue)

The land for the fire station on Sullivan Avenue was given to the town in 1904 by Mary Shreve Ames, the younger daughter of Frederick L. Ames. The station itself was designed by John C. Johnson and built for a cost of \$5,398. The building was used until 1968 as a fire station. The Civil Defense unit was based there too and they continued at the fire station for a number of years after the fire department left. Today, the fire station is the home of the Children's Museum in Easton. (Mary Shreve Ames Frothingham would later give a public park, which is located southwest of the high school, in memory of her husband Congressman Louis A. Frothingham).

## 14) Veterans Memorial Park

(Intersection of Mechanic St. Pond St, & Sullivan Ave)

Veterans Memorial Park is a tribute to the Easton residents who served in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Dedicated on August 29, 2004, most of the physical labor was done by veterans of these wars. The flagpole was the gift of Mrs. David Ames and former Senator Oliver F. Ames.

## 15) Shovel Shop Pond

(Between Pond Street and 35 Oliver Street)

The Shovel Shop Pond can be seen across the street from the Historical Society. The dam that created this pond was built in 1792 to provide power for a nail factory that was bought in 1803 by Oliver Ames. The water from the pond provided the power for the original shovel mill until it was destroyed by fire in 1852. The foundation of the mill still remains at the southeast corner of the pond.

## 16) Governor Ames Estate

(35 Oliver Street)

Located through the gates at the northwest corner of Shovel Shop Pond, the estate is noted for the remarkable collection of fully mature specimen trees. They were planted by the Governor and his botanist son Oakes over 100 years ago. Governor Ames, who was responsible for sales and marketing at the shovel company during his business career, built this house in 1862. After the Governor's wife Anna C. Ames died in 1917, no one lived there and it was taken down 1937. In 1951, David Ames built the current white house on the site. Today this property is owned by The Trustees of Reservations and is open to the public for recreational use year round. Parking is located opposite 50 Oliver St.