

Welcome to Historic

# Norwich, Connecticut

## Norwich – Places and Things

Norwich's rich history and sense of place have ensured the preservation of landmarks like the Old Burying Grounds, Yantic Cemetery, Chelsea Parade, Norwichtown and Little Plain greens. Her streets are lined with accurately restored houses from conservative 18th century Colonials and Georgians to exuberant 19th century Victorians. Monuments to the war dead include those for one who died at Andersonville during the Civil War and to the French soldiers who came to our aid during the Revolution

Norwich architecture represents over 300 years of examples beginning with buildings from the early Republic such as the First Congregational Church, the Jesse Brown Tavern and the Daniel Lathrop School on the Norwichtown green and the Leffingwell Inn off Washington Street. Up and down Broadway and Washington streets are gracious 19th century homes built in many styles by the successful businessmen of Norwich. At the turn of the 20th century, more millionaires made their homes in Norwich than anywhere else in New England. Ponemah Mills, completed in 1871, is believed to have been the largest cotton mill complex in the world. The surrounding village of Taftville with homes built for the mill workers, is a reminder of Norwich's industrial peak.

Downtown Norwich is a showplace of historically important and architecturally magnificent places such as the ornate City Hall, Governor Buckingham's home, and the Wauregan Hotel. The Downtown Chelsea Arts District is home to the Norwich Arts Council gallery, Donald Oat Theater, Art Space gallery and The Spirit of Broadway Theater where theatrical performances and art exhibits are presented year 'round.

Norwich Free Academy is at the mid point between Norwichtown and Downtown with The Slater Museum part of the campus. The museum houses copies of the world's greatest Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Renaissance sculpture. Within the Museum are the Converse Art Gallery, focusing on contemporary Connecticut artists and the Norwich Galleries, displaying fine and decorative art representing 350 years of Norwich History. Art and artifacts from five continents and three millennia are presented.

## Norwich – The Land

From its earliest human habitation, to English settlement, to the present, the people of Norwich have been drawn here by the land. Natives and newcomers have been influenced by dependent upon and in love with the natural features within the "9 mile square" purchased from the Mohegan Indians in 1659. Three rivers: the Yantic, Shetucket and Thames have been essential to agricultural, commercial and industrial development of Norwich through the centuries.

The richness of the river basin created a fertile environment in which life and trade thrived. A fierce battle between two tribes took place here in 1643, giving it the name Indian Leap. Along the Thames River, Trading Cove was an important Mohegan anchorage and Chelsea Landing was established in 1684 where shipbuilding would begin only 10 years later. The sacred Mohegan Royal Burying Ground is sited on high ground above the river. By 1760, Norwich merchants shipped agricultural and industrial products directly to England and the shipbuilding industry continued through most of the 1800's. Nineteenth century steamboat service between Norwich and New York launched Norwich as a transportation center. Meanwhile, along the Yantic and Shetucket rivers, textile mills were built, further developing Norwich as an important, flourishing industrial community. Yantic Falls in the heart of Norwich was a meeting place for indigenous tribes and later supported major industry which captured the power of the falls.

Norwich boasts three rivers and five hills. Two men have been credited with the city's sobriquet, Mayor (1862-1866)

James Lloyd Green, viewing the hills from the banks of the Thames, compared the city to the beautiful petals of a rose. Preacher, abolitionist and suffragist Henry Ward Beecher, visiting Henry B. Norton's Norwich home, declared her "The Rose of New England."

As Norwich developed, the city expanded from Norwichtown to the Harbor and the downtown Chelsea area. Other neighborhoods, such as Yantic, Greenville, Laurel Hill, and Mohegan Park, developed along the rivers as the population and industry grew.

## Norwich – The People

The native peoples called the area by names that have become Shetucket and Yantic today. The Pequot and Mohegan Tribes, joined through marriage, controlled vast hunting grounds. The English settlement known as Norwich was founded in 1659 by Major John Mason and Reverend James Fitch through acquisition from the Mohegans. Major Mason is known as the colonists' Commander during the wars between and among the native tribes and European settlers. He became Deputy Governor of Connecticut.

In the 18th century, Norwich produced leaders of the American Revolution and the United States under the Articles of Confederacy including Samuel Huntington, signer of the Declaration of Independence and the first President under the Confederacy. Benedict Arnold was an outstanding Revolutionary colonial general as well as infamous traitor.

In 19th century Norwich, noteworthy men and women contributed to American invention, industry, arts and letters. Lydia Huntley Sigourney created her school for women. In the 1850's Horace Smith and Daniel Wesson partnered, in Norwich, to develop the first automatic pistol, later founding Smith and Wesson. William Buckingham became Governor of Connecticut through the Civil War years and was a staunch supporter of his friend Abraham Lincoln who visited Norwich just months prior to being elected President.

Lafayette Foster, from Norwich, who, as the Senate pro tempore, became the Vice President of the United States when Lincoln was assassinated.

In the 20th century, Harry Rossoll, born in Norwich, was the artist who created Smokey the Bear, and Edwin H. Land from Norwich invented the Polaroid Camera. Norwich son Wally Lamb became a nationally respected author after several best selling novels.

Norwich has always drawn upon a wide range of diverse cultures for its citizenry. Irish, Polish, Italian, Asian, Haitian and many more have all come to Norwich, found a home and contributed to its economy and society.

## Norwich – Events

When Norwich men and women were called upon to serve their country in war, they did so valiantly. In the 17th century, wars caused the deaths of countless Mohegans, Pequots, Narragansetts and European colonists. Leaders included the Pequot Sachems Tatobem and Sassacus, the Narragansett Sachem Miantonomo, the Mohegan Sachem Uncas and the English Lion Gardner, John Mason, Thomas Leffingwell, Jonathan Brewster, John Winthrop Jr., and the Reverend James Fitch.

In the series of wars for domination of North America against the French during the eighteenth century, Norwich played the part of a purveyor of supplies, transportation and men.

In the Revolutionary War several Norwich men joined the thousands rushing to Massachusetts after the "Lexington Alarm." Many Norwich men commanded ships for the Navy including Jonathan Buddington, William Colt, William Wattles, Henry Billings, Zephaniah Jennings and Elisha Lathrop Jr.

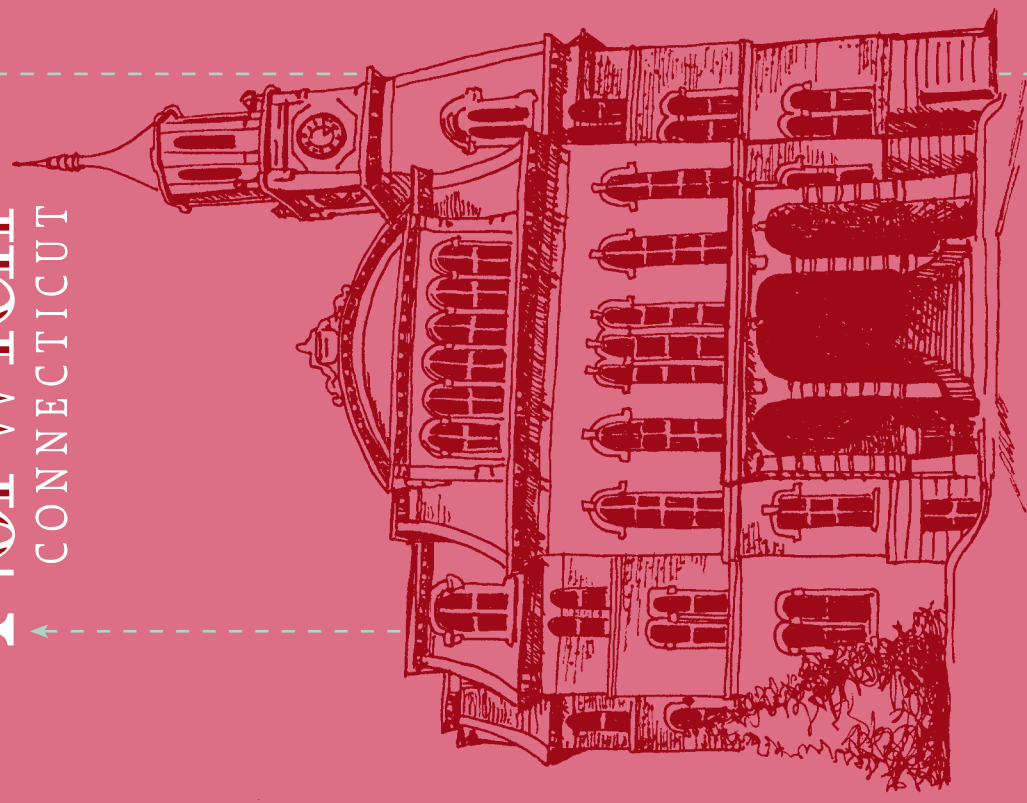
During the Civil War about 1300 Norwich men served in the Army and the Navy. The men from Norwich fought in all the battles of the Eastern Theater, and some fought in Louisiana and Mississippi. They fought at the "Bloody Lane" at Antietam; "Picket's Charge" at Gettysburg; "Marye's Heights" at Fredericksburg, and hundreds of other battles.

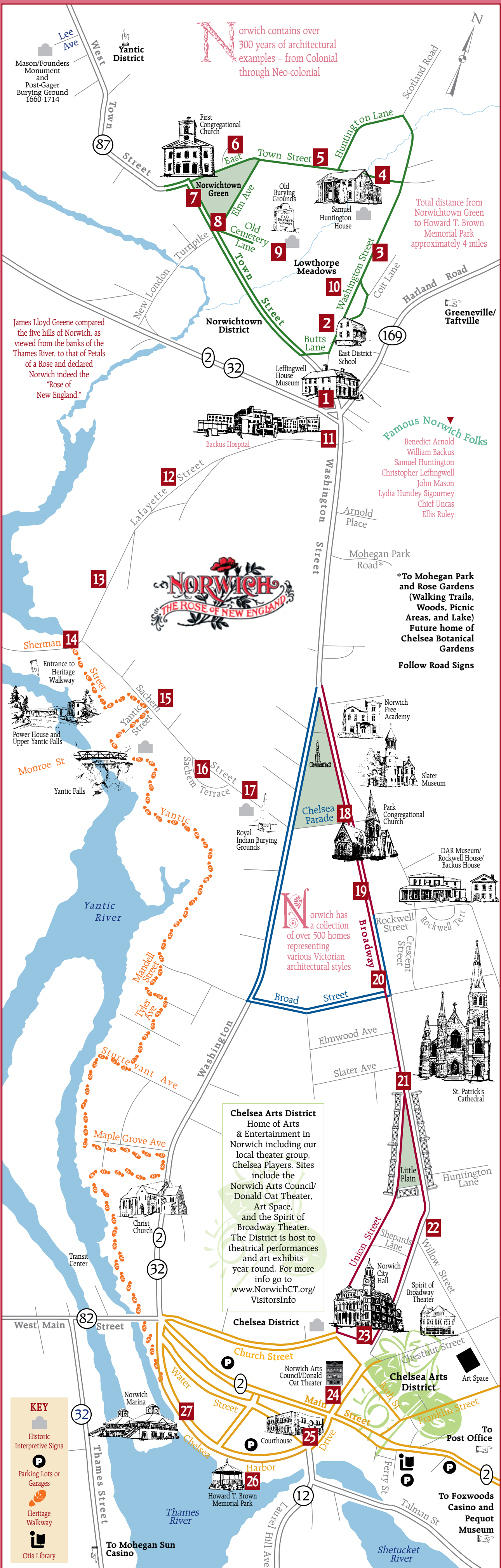
One hundred and fifty six did not return to Norwich alive. Among the many memorials on Chelsea Parade is a monument for Capt. Chester Samuel Reid, naval hero of the War of 1812 who designed the third version of the Stars and Stripes in 1818 at the request of a Congressional Committee. Natural disasters struck Norwich including The Great Flu Epidemic of 1918, which killed 20 million world wide and was responsible for the death of 205 Norwich citizens. When the Spaulding dam failed in 1963, the Spaulding Pond Flood caused personal and public loss. Possibly the worst disaster was caused by the immense hurricane of 1938. During the storm Franklin Square was flooded, scores of people were evacuated by rowboat from homes and businesses. Martial law was declared in Norwich for the first time in history. The storm left Norwich with 600 dead, 2000 injured and \$500 million in damages.



Tourist Guide to Historic

# Norwich CONNECTICUT





Norwich contains over 300 years of architectural examples - from Colonial through Neo-colonial

Total distance from Norwichtown Green to Howard T. Brown Memorial Park approximately 4 miles

James Lloyd Greene compared the five hills of Norwich, as viewed from the banks of the Thames River, to that of Petals of a Rose and declared Norwich indeed the "Rose of New England."

- Famous Norwich Folks**
- Benedict Arnold
  - William Backus
  - Samuel Huntington
  - Christopher Leffingwell
  - John Mason
  - Lydia Huntley Sigourney
  - Chief Uncas
  - Ellis Ruley

\*To Mohegan Park and Rose Gardens (Walking Trails, Woods, Picnic Areas, and Lake) Future home of Chelsea Botanical Gardens

**Follow Road Signs**

**Chelsea Arts District**  
Home of Arts & Entertainment in Norwich including our local theater group, Chelsea Players. Sites include the Norwich Arts Council/Donald Oat Theater, Art Space, and the Spirit of Broadway Theater. The District is host to theatrical performances and art exhibits year round. For more info go to [www.NorwichCT.org/VisitorsInfo](http://www.NorwichCT.org/VisitorsInfo)

Norwich has a collection of over 500 homes representing various Victorian architectural styles

**KEY**

- Historic Interpretive Signs
- Parking Lots or Garages
- Heritage Walkway
- Otis Library

Norwich was once the second most populous city in Connecticut (in the 1750s).

Today, Norwich's population is approximately 35,000. This map highlights a linear area encompassing Norwichtown to the harbor, in the heart of Chelsea (downtown). Other sections of the city, such as Laurel Hill, Greenville, Mohegan Park and Yantic, have their own interesting histories. The brightly colored areas on the map denote the following walking tours:

Norwichtown is in green

Washington & Broad Streets are in blue

Broadway & Union Street are in maroon

"Heritage Walkway" is represented by orange shoes

1 "Heritage Corridor" from Norwichtown to Downtown is a narrated walking tour and is represented by the numbered maroon squares

The companion walking tour brochures and additional information about Norwich are available at [www.NorwichCT.org/VisitorsInfo](http://www.NorwichCT.org/VisitorsInfo)