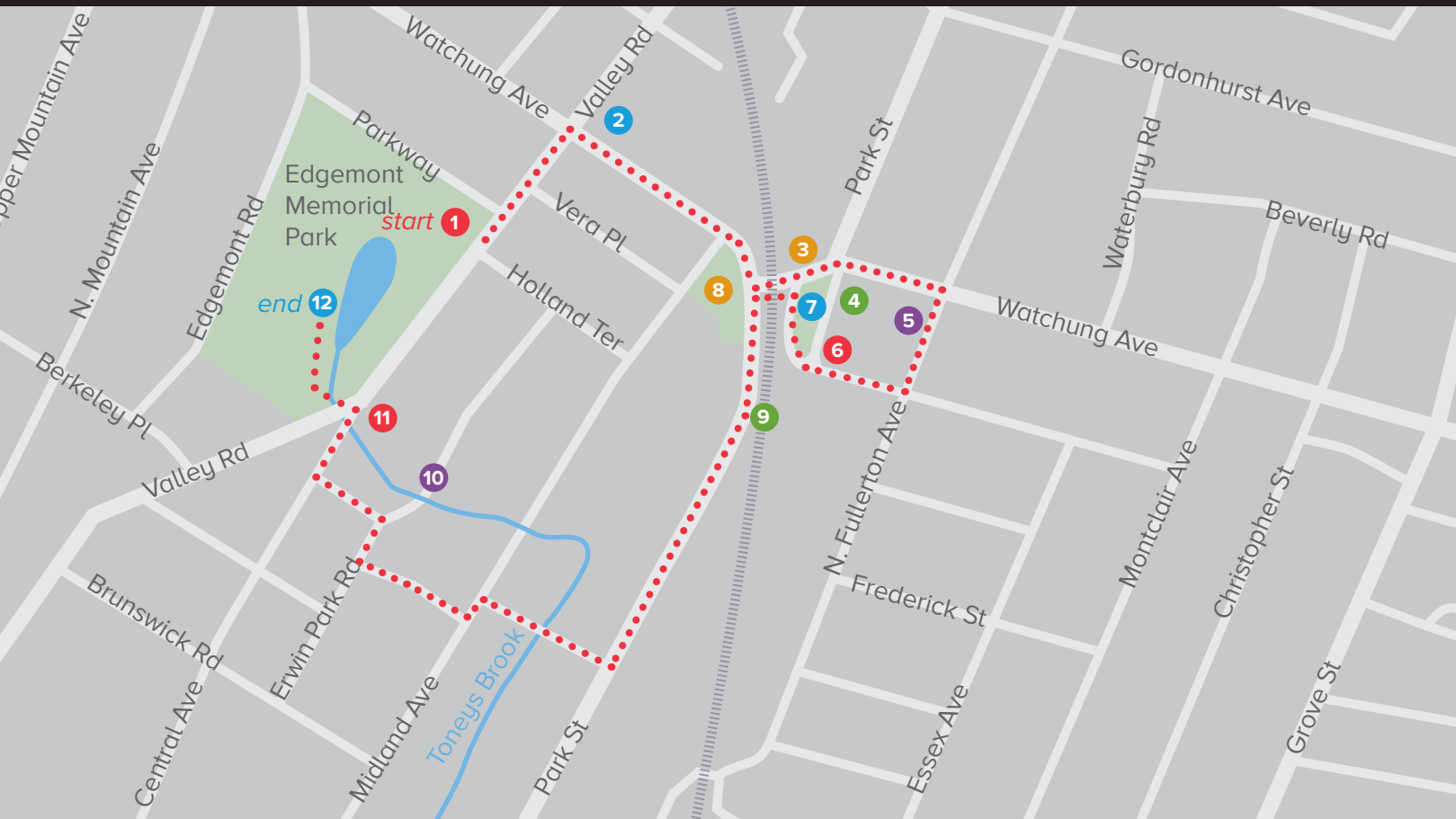


WATCHUNG PLAZA HISTORIC DISTRICT 1.6 MILES

A railroad business district and suburban community



In the early days of Montclair's settlement, Watchung Avenue divided the Dutch farmlands of Speertown in the north end of today's Montclair from the English farmlands of Cranetown. All that changed when the railroad came through in the late 1800s. Developers bought the farms and created business districts and housing around the new stations. This walk, which begins at Edgemont Park, takes you through a **turn-of-the-century business district and commuter suburb**, developed between 1900 and 1930.

Park near the boat house at Edgemont Memorial Park.

1 EDGEMONT MEMORIAL PARK

Today it's a haven for Montclair residents, but in 1896, it was the site of the Montclair Golf Club. When the Club moved to its present site in Verona in 1898, the Erwin Park Golf Club moved in, catering to the growing community that surrounded it. Montclair residents still enjoy skating on the pond, fed by Toney's Brook.

Leave the Park and turn left on to Valley Road. Cross Watchung Avenue, then Valley Road.

2 76 WATCHUNG AVENUE, 1778

You're looking at one of the older homes in Montclair. Note the original stone foundation that may date back to 1778, built by Revolutionary War veteran and wife, Captain Abraham and Fytje Van Gieson. It was remodeled in 1905, then again in 1930.

Continue walking down Watchung Avenue.

3 118 WATCHUNG AVENUE, 1906

After you cross under the railroad bridge, look to your left. This dead-end street connected Watchung Avenue until an overall

improvement project lowered the road and raised the tracks on a steel girder bridge. William and Harry Bennett opened the first business in the area in this building in 1906. Trendsetters, they opened an "auto garage" when most Montclair residents were still using horses and carriages. Six years later, the adjacent two-story building (250-254 Park Street) was built. Its earliest tenants were a barber, grocer, shoemaker, and a confectionary and fruit store – typical neighborhood stores.

Cross Park Street. Continue walking down Watchung Avenue.

4 43 - 51 WATCHUNG PLAZA, 1918

Look across the street at the building on the corner. Clifford Wendehack, a Montclair resident, designed this Tudor-style commercial building. A well-known architect, he primarily designed clubhouses and private homes. His foray into a commercial building came after residents complained about the original design for a building in this location. Wendehack's design became a theme for other buildings, such as 39-41 Watchung Plaza.

"A new block of stores has been erected just east of the station. The original plans for the buildings were about as homely as could be imagined. One of the members of the [Watchung Improvement] association, an architect volunteered at his own expense to redraw these plans along more sightly and artistic lines." – Montclair Times, 1918

Turn right on North Fullerton Avenue, crossing Watchung Avenue. Stop at the entrance to the parking lot.

5 119 WATCHUNG AVENUE, 1923

Look back through the parking lot towards Watchung Avenue. From this angle, the original frame house that stood on this site is visible. By 1923, Richard Mockler had purchased the house, added the one-story storefront, and opened a hardware store.

Turn right again on Fairfield Avenue, then right on Watchung Plaza.

6 17 WATCHUNG PLAZA, 1924-1925

Originally, the doors on the neo-Classical Montclair National Bank building were bronze. Many banks were built in classic styles like this to convey a sense of stability and security.

7 33 WATCHUNG PLAZA, 1926

Designed by Arthur E. Ramhurst, another Montclair architect associated with the development of this district, this building is a great example of the Tudor Revival style common in this neighborhood and Upper Montclair, evoking a bucolic English village.

Turn left on to Watchung Avenue.

8 WATCHUNG PARK AND WATCHUNG PLAZA

The open spaces on either side of the train tracks were set aside as parks in 1920, creating a pleasant approach to the station. A flagpole at the north end of the park is dedicated to Montclair residents who died in World War I, shortly before this park was created.

A plaque at the southern end is dedicated to the four people killed in a 1995 shooting at the U.S. Post Office, then located on Fairfield St.

Go under the railroad bridge, then turn left on Park Street.

9 TRAIN STATION, 1903-1904

In 1896, Erie Railroad leased the Montclair Railroad, then known as the New York and Greenwood Lake Railroad. The original Watchung Station, which had been located on the east side of the tracks, was replaced with this station.

Continue along Park Street about ¼ mile, crossing the street when possible and enjoying the many styles of homes along the way. You will see a small walkway called "Mid Park Lane." Turn right on the walkway. You'll cross over Toney's Brook.

10 ERWIN PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT

You are now in the Erwin Park Historic District, a neighborhood of 50 homes built between 1897 and 1927. As you wander through this neighborhood, note the wide variety of architectural styles – Colonial Revival, Craftsman Bungalow, American Foursquare – set on large properties on winding streets. Walking distance to the station, it was designed to attract prosperous homeowners.

Make a left on to Midland Avenue, then quick right on to Erwin Park. Follow the map through this neighborhood. When you reach Central Avenue, which merges into Valley Road, turn right.



Erwin Park, 1901, at the beginning of its transformation into suburban housing.

11 HARRISON HOUSE, 249 VALLEY ROAD

The old Harrison farm encompassed today's Edgemont Memorial Park and the Erwin Park neighborhood. The Italianate front "wing" was added in 1885; the original 1840 structure is still visible at the rear of the house.

Go back to the crosswalk, cross the street and head into Edgemont Memorial Park. Walk along the west side of the pond. Edgemont Elementary School will be across the park on your left.

12 WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL

Artist Charles Keck designed the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on the island as a tribute to the 71 Montclair men who died in World War I. A bronze figure of Liberty stands on a globe held by eagles. At the base of the obelisk, you'll find a soldier and a sailor. Columbia, goddess of Liberty and the personification of America, stands behind and above them, wearing a helmet and holding a shield. Military division insignia are etched around the base.

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