

The Hungry Hill Neighborhood



Walking Tour

HUNGRY HILL NEIGHBORHOOD BROCHURE

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On the Cover:

Construction is just being completed on Mooreland Street, 1924.
Courtesy of Springfield City Library.

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Hungry Hill is one of Springfield's classic neighborhoods. It has a strong identity based on family ties dating back to Ireland and other Old Countries, church and school at Our Lady of Hope, sports at Van Horn Park, and political campaigns.

This neighborhood developed later than others in Springfield. As late as the 1880's, there were only a few scattered houses on the Hill, most of them farms. Development began to creep up the Hill from the North End along Liberty and Franklin Streets, an area originally developed for large suburban estates. The first streets to be built up on Hungry Hill were Liberty, Amory, Stafford, Grover, and Cleveland. In the 1890's, these streets already were predominantly Irish. The streetcar lines on Liberty and Carew Streets stimulated further settlement of this area by the turn-of-the-century. In 1902, the Amory Street School and the Amory Street Fire Station were built to serve the growing neighborhood. Four years later, Our Lady of Hope Church was established to serve the 800 Catholics living on the Hill.

Hungry Hill became the neighborhood we know today between 1900-1930. Rows of trademark two-family houses went up on Mooreland, Parkside, Governor, Miller, Hastings, and Clantoy Streets. Bungalows were erected on Phoenix and Freeman Terraces. Single-family Colonials were built on Chapin Terrace and Melha Avenue. The area grew so much that Our Lady of Hope Church had 7,700 parishioners by the 1930's.

The predominantly-Irish population created a strong sense of community during these years. Social life revolved around Our Lady of Hope

or conversations at "The Corner" (of Armory and Carew). Every block seemed to have its own baseball team. The Bluebirds lived near Carew and Newbury; the Aces hailed from Phoenix Terrace and Hastings Street; the Blackstones played out of the Liberty Lots near Clantoy Street; Governor, Miller, and Armory Streets produced the Acorns and the Golden Lakes; the Penacook Braves came from the area around Penacook and Carew Streets. Families socialized and found much of their entertainment within the neighborhood, since autos were still rare.

After World War II, many of the streets between Newbury and St. James Avenue filled out with single-family ranches and capes, and many of the inhabitants of the older part of the Hill moved here and on to East Springfield. In the 1960's part of the lower slope of the Hill off Liberty Street was cleared for Interstate-291.

Today, according to the City Planning Department, Hungry Hill covers the area bounded by Narragansett Street, the main east-west railroad tracks and Interstate-291, St. James Avenue, and the Chicopee city line. This primarily residential area has over 13,000 inhabitants. In recent years, Hungry Hill has been revitalized by a wave of housing renovations. Real estate prices have climbed as this conveniently-located neighborhood has become increasingly desirable. Community pride is evidenced by the Hungry Hill Block Party, the Shamrock Festival at Our Lady of Hope, neighborhood reunions, and the establishment of the Hope Community Center. The renewed sense of community has enhanced the quality of life in Hungry Hill and all of Springfield.

EXPLORING HUNGRY HILL

ARMORY STREET

1. Armory Street School, 426 Armory Street (1902)—You can use schools and churches to trace the development of a neighborhood. The first public school on Hungry Hill was a one-room wooden structure erected here in 1885 to serve the families clustered around Armory, Liberty, and Stafford Streets. The present brick building was built in 1902 and the rear wing added seven years later. The architect was G. Wood Taylor, son-in-law of developer William McKnight and designer of the Wesson Hospital and magnificent houses in McKnight and Forest Park.

2. Armory Street Fire Station, 440 Armory Street (1902)—The architect was B. H. Seabury, who designed the City's fire stations on Mill, Pine, and Oakland Streets as well. In partnership with F. R. Richmond, Seabury also designed the Jefferson Avenue and Tapley Street Schools. The fire station's tower was used to hang and dry the hoses.

3. Our Lady of Hope Church, 474 Armory Street (1938)—Our Lady of Hope, perched on the crest of Hungry Hill, is one of Springfield's most prominent landmarks. The parish was started in 1906 to serve the 800 Catholics living in Hungry Hill and East Springfield. A simple wooden church on the east side of Armory Street sufficed until the 1920's, when the parishioners' growing wealth and sense of identity stimulated them to build a grand Italian Renaissance edifice. Pastor James M. Cruse said the first Mass in the church basement in 1926, and twelve years later the church was completed. By this time, the parish had grown to 7,700 members.

Our Lady of Hope may be the most striking work of diocesan architect John W. Donohue



Our Lady of Hope Church soon after completion. Photographed by WPA, 1938-40.

(1872-1941). Donohue placed his stamp on the landscape of Central and Western Massachusetts with seventy ecclesiastical buildings, including twenty-eight churches. Donohue favored two architectural styles for his churches: the Italian Renaissance style he employed at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and All Souls; and the English Gothic style used at Holy Family and Holy Cross of Holyoke.

Our Lady of Hope is modelled after Santo Spirito in Florence, Italy. The belfry is Donahue's trademark, adapted from the belltowers of Central and Northern Italy.

Our Lady of Hope's relationship to its neighborhood is almost European. You can see the belltower from many points in the neighborhood. And you can hear the bells signalling Mass, the Angelus, Noon, and Matins.

The church is Hungry Hill's central social

institution as well. In the church's basement, the Hope Center serves as an elderly and social center and headquarters of the Hungry Hill Neighborhood Council.

4. Christian Education Center (Old Our Lady of Hope School), 625 Carew Street, (1920)—Designed by John W. Donohue, who designed many parochial schools. It now is used as the offices for the Catholic Diocesan Schools.

5. Our Lady of Hope School, 474 Armory Street (1964)—Built by Father John Power to accommodate the expanding school-age population. The new school also hosts weekly Bingo evenings and athletic events in the gym.

6. 551 Armory Street (c. 1875)—With a double lot and a substantial setback from the street, this house seems out of place in the neighborhood. The reason: it was originally the house for a farm which covered much of the area east of Armory Street. The Trask family, which owned the farmhouse around the turn-of-the-century, subdivided Governor Street for residences. The simple side-gabled house has no architectural ornament like vernacular houses of the period.

7. Van Horn Park, between Miller Street and Chapin Terrace on the south and Beauchamp and Cunningham Streets on the north—This 120-acre park originally was Springfield's first water supply reservoir. In 1848, Charles Stearns piped water from a brook in Van Horn to Downtown Springfield. In 1864, the reservoir on the east side of Armory Street was built, with Armory Street as the dam; the smaller reservoir west of Armory Street was finished in 1870. When the Ludlow Reservoir opened in 1875, Van Horn continued to serve the North End and Downtown. Its use was discontinued in 1908, when the City started tapping the Little River watershed. At that time, Van Horn was turned into a city park.



The Upper Reservoir at Van Horn Park. Photographed by Robert Jackson.

On the corner of Van Horn Park at Armory and Miller Streets, the Hampden County Truant School stood from 1872-1916. After it closed, the farm land that the Truant School had used was turned into athletic fields. In 1922, a wooden grandstand seating 1200 was erected at the main baseball diamond, the scene of countless youth, high school, and semi-pro games. The grandstand was replaced by bleachers in 1953. Two years later, the Van Horn Field House and the John L. Sullivan Monument were dedicated. John L. Sullivan had been "The King of the Kids," the founder of little league baseball in Springfield.

Today Van Horn Park offers many ball fields, basketball and tennis courts, a playground, excellent trails for walking, jogging, or biking, and acres of woodland. Come on Sunday mornings in autumn for the aggressive competition of Western Mass. Touch Football or on sweltering summer evenings for American Legion baseball.

The old house near the corner of Armory Street and Chapin Terrace was the caretaker's house when the reservoir was in existence during the 1860's. It can be dated to that time by the window sashes which contain six panes, a style that vanished after the Civil War.



Construction of Melha Avenue from Carew Street, 1924. Courtesy of Springfield City Library.

Carew Street

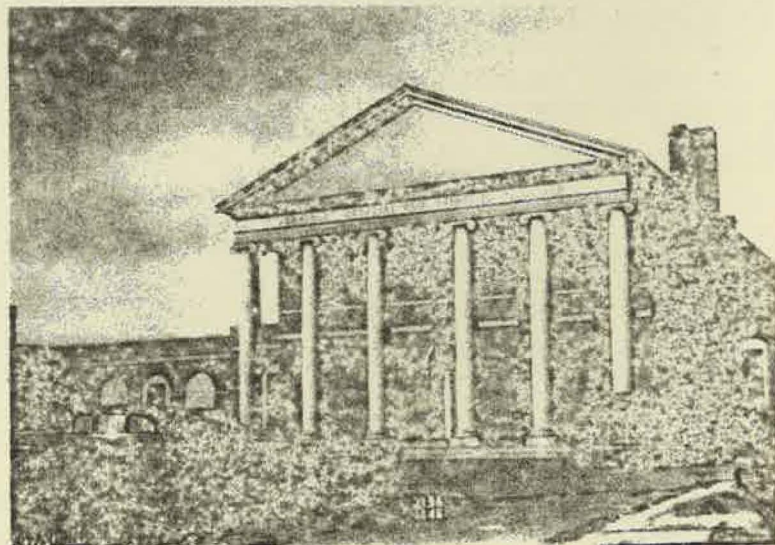
Carew Street leads from Main Street in the North End through East Springfield to Chicopee. In the 1860's, it was called Morgan Road east from Prospect Street. Carew was always a major west-east artery, carrying streetcars and autos.

8. Springfield Boy's Club, 481 Carew Street (1967)—The Boy's Club has a long history in Springfield stretching back to 1891. It stood on the corner of Chestnut and Ferry Streets until 1967 when it was demolished for the North Urban Renewal Project. That year, the

Boy's Club moved up to Carew Street to property known as the Brickyards or Hendee Park. Its gym, swimming pool, library, and meeting rooms are used by people of all ages.

9. Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children, 516 Carew Street (1925)—In 1922, the Shriners wanted to establish a hospital for crippled children in New England, either in Springfield or Boston. Six Rolls-Royces chartered by Springfield Shriner and motorcycle inventor George Hendee met the selection committee at Springfield's Union Station. The delegation was wine, dined, and put up at the Colony Club. When they traveled to Boston, no one met them or showed them around. So they decided to locate the hospital in Springfield.

Designed by architect Max Westoff, the hospital's main portico is Classical Revival with Ionic columns. This orthopedic hospital accepts no payment from the children's families or third-party insurers.



Shriners' Hospital. Photographed by WPA, 1938-40.

How Hungry Hill Was Named

Every St. Patrick's Day, neighbors hang a banner across Carew Street near Armory which says "Hungry Hill - Home of the Irish." Though the press has referred to the neighborhood as Liberty Heights or the Van Horn area, natives call it Hungry Hill.

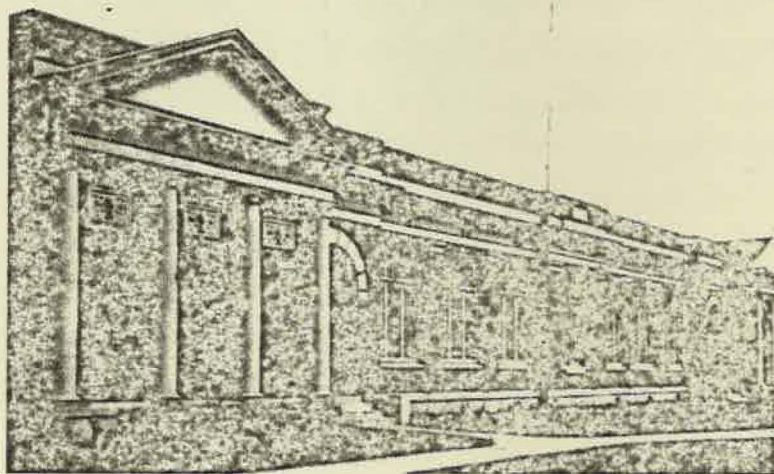
The debate over the origins of Hungry Hill's name has been heated. Some say the Irish immigrants who settled on the Hill were poor and "hungry." Another school of thought rejoins that the Hill's large families gained a reputation in the early 20th century for ordering large amounts of food from grocery stores so that no one was "hungry" on the Hill. Others argue that the cops on the beat could find no restaurants and got "hungry" on the Hill.

Some scholars have traced the name to a place in County Cork, Ireland. They argue that Springfield's first Irish immigrants, who settled in the North End in the mid-19th century, thought the Hill resembled a place near their home in West Cork near Bantry Bay.

This is a detailed street map of the Van Horn Park area in Chicago. The map shows a grid of streets, with Van Horn Park located in the upper left quadrant. The park is bounded by Van Horn Ave to the north, Ontario St to the east, and various smaller streets to the south and west. The map includes numerous street names, such as Van Horn Ave, Ontario St, and various smaller streets like Van Horn St, Ontario St, and Van Horn St. The map also shows the location of Van Horn Park and the surrounding urban layout. The map is oriented with North at the top, and the streets are labeled with their names. The map is a black and white line drawing, showing the streets and parks in a clear and concise manner. The map is a useful tool for navigating the area and finding specific locations.

10. Commercial Buildings, 600-602 Carew and 500-510 Armory Streets—In 1915, the first stores opened at this intersection. Ten years later, this entire block was completed. The Spanish-style green tile facade roof was especially popular in the 1920's. When Leo's Spa stood on the east corner of Armory Street, this intersection was called "The Corner." Dozens of men could be seen here confabbing after Mass on Sundays. This block burned in February, 1986.

11. Brunton Park, intersection of Carew & Liberty Streets—This triangle has long been considered the geographic heart of Hungry Hill. In olden days, it was referred to as "Bottle Park." It was renovated in 1984 and dedicated to Mayor Daniel Brunton, a resident of nearby Kendall Street.



Liberty School. Photographed by WPA, 1938-40.

12. Liberty School, 962 Carew Street (1918)—During World War I, the U.S. government sold "Liberty" bonds, sauerkraut was called "Liberty"

sausage, and Springfield built "Liberty" School. It was designed by Frank King, associated with prominent school architects Gardner & Gardner.

13. Van Sickle Junior High School, 1170 Carew Street (1911)—Named for Springfield School Superintendent James Hixon Van Sickle (1911-23), Van Sickle was the city's first school to be built specifically as a junior high. It incorporated the latest in vocational and home economics training. Van Sickle was built midway between Hungry Hill and East Springfield to serve those neighborhoods. Gardner & Gardner, Springfield's leading school architects, designed three modernistic Neo-Classical porticoes for this sprawling brick structure.

Liberty Street

14. Anderson & Benson Self Storage, 270 Liberty Street (c. 1854)—The main office is actually the remains of Wason Car Manufacturing President Thomas W. Wason's estate. During the mid-19th century, Franklin and Liberty Streets were considered the outskirts of town and were lined by suburban villas. The 270 Liberty building has the overhanging cornice with Italianate brackets and the Italianate full-length window sashes.

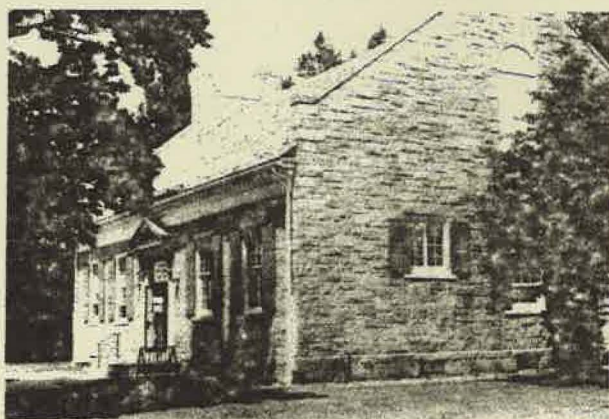
15. Gurdon Bill Park, corner of Liberty and Genesee Streets—This recently restored park is the former site of the Gurdon Bill Estate called "Vineland." The house is long gone, but the wooded ravines have been a City park since 1920. Gurdon Bill (1827-1916), one of Springfield's business leaders in the latter 19th century, was a publisher, president of the Springfield & New London Railroad, and president of the Second National Bank of Springfield. Bill served one term each on the City Council and in the Massachusetts House of

Representatives and donated the Civil War Monument in Court Square in 1885.

16. St. Benedict's Cemetery, south side of Liberty Street at I-291 Rotary (1847)--St. Benedict's was named for the first Catholic church in Springfield, which was located near Union and Willow Streets. All its plots were sold by 1884, when St. Michael's took over as the pre-eminent Catholic cemetery in Springfield.

17. American Legion Post 430, 605 Liberty Street--When the soldiers from Hungry Hill returned from World War II, they founded Post 430 and established a neighborhood social center. The original building was opened in 1953, and Senator John F. Kennedy was present for the dedication. In 1978, the A&P replaced the original building with a supermarket, and the Post built new quarters behind the A&P.

18. T. P. Sampson Funeral Home, 710 Liberty Street--Any social history of the Hill should include Sampson's, which has been the scene of thousands of neighborhood wakes. It was opened in 1930 as the John B. Shea Colonial Funeral Parlor. Prior to this, wakes on Hungry Hill took place in the houses of the deceased.



Liberty Branch Library. Photographed by Pamela Ford-Vachon, 1985.

19. Liberty Branch Library, 773 Liberty Street (1931)--The Liberty Branch Library was originally located in the basement of the Liberty Methodist Church. It moved into its own quarters, designed by architect Max Westoff, in 1931. This and other branch libraries were paid for with private funds by a bequest from Andrew Carnegie and other donors.

20. Liberty Methodist Church, 821 Liberty Street (1922)--This congregation started as a mission meeting in a house at Cleveland and Liberty Streets in 1900. Five years later, the mission built a church on the east corner of Liberty and Carew Streets, the site of a convenience store today. On January 1, 1922, the congregation dedicated the present Gothic structure.

21. 998 Liberty Street (c. 1877)--This house for a long time belonged to the Abbe family, one of Springfield's most prominent. The Abbe farm (the barn remains) stretched to the Chicopee line. The Gothic Revival house has gingerbread gable decoration and steeply pitched gables.

22. 1173 Liberty Street (c. 1850)--This is the oldest house in this part of the city. It was for a long time a farm house for the Searle family and, since 1926, for the Hogan family. The barn behind the house is still filled with antique carriages, farm implements, and tools. The land originally attached to the house includes the Abbe Brook area (once was Chicopee's water supply), a pond used for ice-cutting, and the area developed in the 1950's for such residential streets as Whittaker, Greaney, and Mayher Streets.

23. WGGB-TV Channel 40, 1300 Liberty Street (1954)--This ABC affiliate grew out of WHYN Radio, which originated in Holyoke in 1941. The television station was established in 1953 as

Channel 55 on Mt. Tom, where its transmitter still stands. A year later, the station moved its studios to more spacious quarters on Liberty Street. As one of the highest points in Springfield, this site enabled Channel 55 to transmit its signal to the main Mt. Tom transmitter.

24. Springfield Shopping Plaza, 1225-1387 Liberty Street—This land was originally owned by farmer John Abbe, the first settler in this area. In the early 20th century, it was called Imperial, then Victor Athletic Park before becoming the Springfield Airport in 1927 (closed 1952). The Airport was home of the streamlined GeeBee Airplanes, which were built by the Granville family. In 1931, Lowell Bayles set the world air speed record in a GeeBee. Maude Tait, who also flew out of the Springfield Airport, set the speed record for women that year.

In 1953, developers announced plans to build a monster shopping center with 7500 parking places at the vast airfield. Six years later the Springfield Shopping Plaza opened with 4000 parking spaces, hundreds of which have never been used. It remains the largest strip shopping center in Western Massachusetts.

Phoenix Terrace

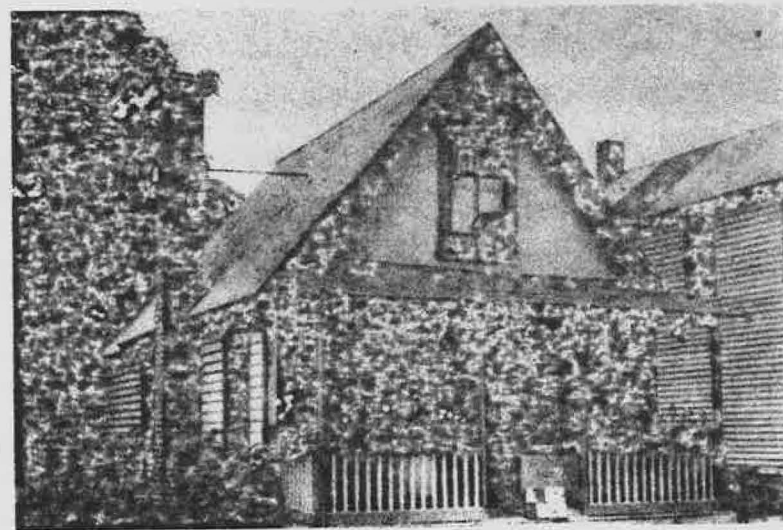
Between 1868-1914, the area of Phoenix Terrace and other streets south of Liberty and Carew was the site of the Adventist Camp Meeting (in later years still called the Campgrounds). The Camp Meeting attracted thousands of Adventists from around the country for prayer and teaching. Attendees stayed in tents before erecting small, one-and-a-half storey cottages. When the Campgrounds closed and the area developed as residential streets, some of the cottages were moved and used as homes. Phoenix and Freeman Terraces, with their broad grassy

terraces in the middle of the street, became the focal points of this residential area.

25. 101 Phoenix Terrace (1917)—The single-family bungalow is the prevalent housing type on Phoenix Terrace. It is in the Craftsman Style, which originated in California and spread across the country in the 1910's and 1920's. Its features include the low-pitched side gable roof, the large central dormer, exposed roof rafters, and a full-width porch supported by heavy pedestals. Built by the Berard Brothers, a family still involved in house-building in the Springfield area.

26. 125 Phoenix Terrace (1917)—This one-floor bungalow is an example of economical, yet attractive housing. Note the Craftsman-style porch.

Nottingham Street



408 Nottingham Street. Example of a Campgrounds cottage. Photographed by WPA, 1938-40.

27. 408 Nottingham Street (c. 1900; moved 1914)—One of the best examples of an Adventist

Camp cottage. Note the screen porch, the half-storey second floor, and the small size.

Underwood Street

28. Our Lady of the Rosary Rectory, 28 Underwood Street (1854)--The most visible (from I-291) mid-19th century mansion still standing in the Liberty-Franklin Street area. This area was called Prospect Hill and remained an elite section until 1910. Notice the elaborately-carved Italianate brackets under the cornices, the Classical window lintels, and the trademark cupola. It was built for Joshua Bliss Vinton. Vinton had managed the Hampden House, moved to New York and made a fortune in the 1840's, and returned to Springfield to retire.

THE TWO-AND THREE-DECKERS OF HUNGRY HILL

The dominant image of Hungry Hill is tree-lined streets bordered by two-and three-family houses. The height and closeness of the homes creates a distinctly urban impression. These streets bespeak a stable, neighborly way of life.

The housing stock was built mainly between 1900-30 as lower-cost housing for workers and their families. Many immigrants made the two-and three-deckers of Hungry Hill their first home in America. It speaks well of the "City of Homes" that immigrants lived in spacious up-to-date houses, not the tenement slums of other cities.

The basic Hungry Hill house is the two-family (it also can be found in other neighbor-

hoods developed in the early 20th century such as Forest Park, South End, North End, Bay, and Upper Hill). If you strip away the porch, you will find the front-gabled vernacular single-family house derived from the Greek Revival style that was popular throughout the Northeast between 1850 and 1930. The second dwelling unit was created by enlarging the structure and dividing it horizontally. Most units have six rooms, including a living room, dining room, kitchen, and three bedrooms. Two-family houses in Springfield tend to have double porches whose supporting posts are designed in the style of the period--spindlework from Queen Anne, Ionic columns from Colonial Revival, and slanted piers from the Craftsman Style. You may trace the development of the two-family house and the Springfield standard-of-living through the increasing size and ornamentation of the front porches.

The two-family house appeared during the latter 19th century throughout urban New England, where land was at a premium. In places like Springfield, the two-family house allowed one family to rent out another floor, a popular way for the owner to pay the mortgage and the renter to enjoy decent accommodations.

Three-family houses come in two types: those built by adding a floor to the standard two-family house and the unadorned three-decker that developed in Eastern Massachusetts. The three-decker is more prevalent in Worcester and Boston than in Springfield. This building became the main low-cost dwelling by the 1880's. It is long and narrow with the short side to the street. The roof is flat, and the front tends to have protruding window bays. By the 1910's, many three-deckers added full front porches.

For a tour of representative two- and three-family houses on Hungry Hill, see the following homes:

29. 68-70 Grover Street (c. 1895)--This house is a front-gable two-family house with Victorian styling. Notice the spindlework on the first-floor porch and the contrasting painted decorative shingles in the gable. This house is one of the best renovated examples of the original Victorian style in Hungry Hill.



100-102 Mooreland Street. Example of a two-decker house. Photographed by WPA, 1938-40.

30. 100-102 Mooreland Street (1924)--The former home of Congressman Edward P. Boland is an excellent example of the two-family homes built during the 1920's on Mooreland, Parkside, and a dozen other streets on Hungry Hill. It has the standard six rooms over six. The open front porches are supported by slanted piers. Charles Pratte built the house for \$7,500.

31. 97-99 Melha Avenue (1928)--The deluxe model of the two-family house. On Melha you will notice an added wing which contains a sun porch. This particular house has Colonial

Revival Ionic columns and a separate front entrance for the upper unit. The two-car garage was a novelty for two-family houses when it was built.

32. 572-74 Carew Street (c. 1910)--An example of the three-decker that was popular in Eastern Massachusetts. Notice the flat roof and the protruding front window bay. This three-decker has a triple front porch. Most houses like this were not designed by architects but were constructed by builders from standard designs. Each builder might add a variation with different types of supports on the porch. This three-decker has attractive shingled porches. For a three-decker without porches see 37 Wait Street.

33. 821-23 Carew Street (1914)--With gambrel gables on the front and the side, this house was influenced by Colonial Revival designs for single- and two-family houses. The triple porches have Ionic columns. Note the stained glass windows that were popular in hallways this era.



572-574 Carew Street. Example of a three-decker. Photographed by WPA, 1938-40.