Downtown Attleboro
Jewelry Mfg. District
Walking Tour

KEY:
1) Attleboro Refining Company - (1899)
   (now the Attleboro Area Industrial Museum)
2) Robinson Bldg. #1 (c. 1875)
3) Bates / D.F. Briggs Co. Complex
4) Ingraham Bldg. (1908)
5) PlastiCraft, Inc.
6) D.E. Makepeace (1901/1915)
7) Swank Complex (1902+)
8) Robbins / M.S. Chain Co.
9) Armory (1910)
10) Union Theatre (1926)
11) Railroad Stations
    (1906 / 1908)
12) S. O. Bigney Co.
    (c. 1895 + 1906/07)
13) Central Businesss District
14) Taunton Branch R.R.
    Signal Tower (c. 1875)
AB) NYNHH RR Arch Bridges
DAB) Park Street
Double Arch Bridge (1906)
In the late 1880s and one of the earliest occupants manufactured "mother of pearl" buttons from sea shells. There are shells that were dumped on the premises that have round holes in them where the button blanks were cut. Imitation pearls were made by dipping glass beads in a solution made from fish scales. The Robbins Co., which was founded in 1892 by Charles M. Robbins and specialized in the production of college seals, class pins, flags, fraternal emblems and badges, moved to this building in 1903. The company remained here forty-six years before moving to their new plant on O'Neill Boulevard in 1949. The M. S. Company which was started in December 1913 with S. M. Einstein president, Max Schweinshaut, treasurer, and Eugene Claupin, clerk, bought the building at 61 School Street in 1920 for the manufacture of jewelry chains and findings in gold, silver, plate and brass for the manufacturing jewelers and kindred trades.

[D.F. Briggs – Union Street @ Mill Street]

The D. E. Makepeace Company was one of the leading businesses responsible for Attleboro's dramatic rise as the hub of the jewelry industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The business was founded in Providence in 1885 by David E. Makepeace and relocated to Attleboro. In 1888 with one pair of rolls and a small gas furnace as its only equipment, space was leased from other jewelry manufacturers and in the "Steam Power Building" before the construction of its own factory in 1900. The firm specialized in plating and processing of precious metals (gold, silver and platinum) into findings, tubing, sheets and wire which were then sold to other firms which manufactured the finished jewelry products. The firm retained its own metallurgist and operated its own metallurgy lab and was known for the excellent temper, workability and color of its products. In 1930 the company was capitalized at $100,000 and had 125 employees. It had gained a reputation as the largest jewelry manufacturer of its type in the world. The firm continued to prosper, adding a new wing to the plant in 1915 and increasing its labor force to 400. In 1952, the company was acquired by the Englehard Mineral Co. A new modern one-story plant was built in Plainville and commenced operations in 1958. The new plant was equipped to treat uranium for atomic energy was added to the NRHP in 1985. It has since been converted into apartments.

[S.O. Bigney Co., noted rolled gold plated chain and sterling silver novelty manufacturer, began in North Attleboro as Marsh & Bigney in 1879 and moved to the Robinson Building in Attleboro in 1881. In 1894 Bigney bought out C. A. Marsh's interest and the firm became the S.O. Bigney Co. Colonel Bigney himself did not retire until the age of 89 and even after that the business continued to be carried on in his name billed as "The Largest Jewelry Plant in the United States."

[Central Business District]

The Attleboro Signal Tower is the only remaining wood tower within the MBTA system and is a significant example of wooden railroad architecture. It also represents a period of signal tower construction from the mid-19th century when all towers were wood. This is the only tower in the system that has not been taken out of service and/or replaced by a brick tower. From 1904-1906 the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad raised the grade level tracks in Attleboro, constructed the northbound station and several signal towers. The tower was moved at the time of this construction and is the only remaining wood tower in the MBTA system. The tower originally signaled the Taunton Branch, but after automatic switching was installed in 1930, its function was reduced to serving four local Attleboro locations.

[Route 123 near Falmouth - Taunton Branch Railroad Signal Tower (c. 1875)]

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[Mill Street & South Main Street Arch Railroad Bridges (1906)]

These three bridges are among the four filled-spandrel stone arch bridges constructed in 1906 when the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad eliminated eleven grade crossings in Attleboro. (The fourth is located at Peck Street, just north of the map). The bridges still carry Amtrak and MBTA trains.

[M.V.M. Armory (1910)]

Designed by well-known Rhode Island architects Wm. R. Walker & Sons. Now used as a community center.

[Union Theatre (1926)]

The northbound station was built 1906 by the NY, NH&H RR as part of the grade crossing elimination project. The southbound station opened in 1908.

[98 County Street – S.O. Bigney (c. 1895 + 1906/07)]

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