



Essay Contest “Waltham’s History – The Nation’s History” Suggested Topics List

Waltham Residents: Big Visions

Waltham has historically produced many types of leaders: civic leaders, industrialists, inventors, politicians, soldiers, businesspeople, artists, social reformers, doctors and more. Leaders from Waltham have included Christopher Gore, Robert Treat Paine, Nathaniel P. Banks, Cornelia Warren, Theodore Lyman, and Francis Cabot Lowell. You may select one of these people and write an essay on why he or she is important in American history and how Waltham gave that person his or her leadership skills. **Sources:** Gore Place, Lyman Estate, Stonehurst, The Waltham Historical Society, The Waltham Museum, Charles River Museum of Industry, Girl Scout Museum at Cedar Hill.

Remembering Waltham’s Soldiers

Waltham residents have served in every major war since the American Revolution. Many residents gave their lives in service to our country. Write an essay on any soldier that has a brick in the Circle of Remembrance or is memorialized elsewhere in the city. Tell the story of their life, their service, and their contribution to the City of Waltham and the nation. **Sources:** City of Waltham - Dept. of Veterans Services – Veterans’ Memorials, The Waltham Historical Society, The Waltham Museum.

On the Homefront: Waltham During Wartime

While Waltham soldiers were away at war, residents left behind coped with the changes in everyday life. This included rationing, providing supplies for the soldiers and changes in job opportunities. Some groups did not support America’s participation in the wars. How did life change in Waltham during the American Revolution, Civil War, World War I or World War II? How did residents react to the wars? **Sources:** City of Waltham - Dept. of Veterans Services – Veterans’ Memorials, The Waltham Historical Society, The Waltham Museum, Stonehurst, Gore Place.

Waltham: Incubator of Innovation

Waltham was the home to the first cotton factory in the United States and the home to the Waltham Watch Company, which perfected the process of mass production. New techniques developed first in Waltham influenced factory designs nationwide. Chalk, power steering and the semi-automatic rifle are among the items invented in Waltham. Waltham’s mansions are also distinguished by convention-breaking designs and the latest in household technologies. Select something that was invented or innovated in Waltham and describe how it improved life in America. **Sources:** Gore Place, Charles River Museum of Industry, The Waltham Museum, The Waltham Historical Society, Lyman Estate, Stonehurst.

Location, Location, Location

Waltham has always been in the right place at the right time. Its fertile soil attracted farmers for generations. Wealthy Boston families chose Waltham as a location for their summer homes. Francis Cabot Lowell decided to locate his important textile factory here because of the Charles River waterfall. Cornelia Warren donated land that became a nature and camping retreat. Many high tech businesses located here in the 1950s because of the newly-constructed Route 128. Write an essay about how Waltham's geographic location has helped the city's economy and quality of life. **Sources:** Charles River Museum of Industry, The Waltham Historical Society, Lyman Estate, Gore Place, Stonehurst, Girl Scout Museum at Cedar Hill.

Waltham's Immigrants

Immigrants have played a major role in Waltham's business and culture. Compare how immigrants contributed to the city in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. **Sources:** Charles River Museum of Industry, The Waltham Historical Society, The Waltham Museum.

Geographic Transformations in Waltham

From the time of settlement through the 20th century, Waltham underwent a process of transformation from rural village to urban center to modern suburb. Select a location in Waltham (a historic site or a neighborhood) and describe how and why that part of Waltham changed over at least a 100-year time period.

Sources: Gore Place, Lyman Estate, Stonehurst, The Waltham Historical Society, Charles River Museum of Industry, The Waltham Museum, Girl Scout Museum at Cedar Hill.

The Lyman Estate Greenhouses

During the 19th century explorers traveled the globe and imported exotic plants to the United States for the first time. The Lyman family participated in this activity and brought many exotic plants back to their greenhouses in Waltham. Write about the Lyman Estate greenhouses. **Source:** Lyman Estate

Public Education in Waltham and It's Influence Nationally

From Waltham's earliest days as a precinct of Watertown, education has been valued by its inhabitants. With education and personal improvement as core elements of the area's earliest settlers, investigate how that philosophy has evolved in this community, and examine initiatives begun in Waltham that have had an impact on this Nation's history. **Source:** The Waltham Historical Society

Waltham – Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution

Waltham claims the title of “Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution” largely due to the work of Francis Cabot Lowell, creator of America's first power loom, co-founder of the Boston Manufacturing Company and developer of what came to be known as the “Waltham System” of manufacturing. What was new about what Lowell did here in Waltham? How do these things earn Waltham its title? **Sources:** Charles River Museum of Industry, The Waltham Museum.

Keeping Time in The Watch City

Long before the invention of watches, time was often kept by the sun overhead. Cities in the east (like Waltham) were a few minutes ahead of their neighbors in the west (like Chicago). In 1883, Standard Railway Time was adopted so that trains could run on a fixed schedule. Time no longer conformed to the natural rhythm of the sun, but to the mechanical pace of the railroad station clock and factory whistle. The controversy over Railroad Time vs. Sun Time continued until 1918 when daylight savings time was first adopted. How did this controversy affect the Watch City? How did life in Waltham change with the changes in time-telling technology?

Sources: Charles River Museum of Industry, The Waltham Historical Society, Stonehurst.

Please note: The National Archives and The Waltham Public Library have many resources that relate to these topics and we encourage you to use them. Also, you may choose a topic that is not listed. The basic requirement is that your topic fits with the theme “Waltham's History – The Nation's History, and your topic and your essay relate to the site you choose to visit.

Send questions to: Walthamessay@nara.gov