

## “Heater Pieces”

*An old Yankee term for those triangular parcels of land situated in or near intersections*

—by Daniel Cruson

They resulted from the practice of cutting corners when approaching the intersection and can be seen in countless vintage photos of an area’s 19<sup>th</sup> century dirt roads.

The term comes from the antique irons our great grandmothers used to smooth family garments so as to make sure that creases were in their proper places. These irons had interchangeable wooden handles.

A classic “heater piece” can be found at the intersection of Borough Lane and South Main Street, Route 25 in Connecticut. When it was laid out, it was a “T” intersection, meaning that Borough Lane joined South Main at right angles. Over time, traffic impatiently cut the corner.

Rather than going out to the main road, the wagon cut to the left or right, eventually scoring a travel path clear of vegetation on a diagonal to that main road. The road as it was laid out, was not traveled on, and so became cluttered with vegetation forming a green triangle, or “heater piece.”

As the roads became paved in the years after World War II, the travel paths were covered with bituminous macadam, and the heater piece remained an island in the intersection.

A spectacular example of this last part of heater piece formation is the Hattertown Green. Here HI Barlow Road was laid out to run north to a T intersection with Hattertown Road.

Impatient traffic, which wanted to turn right at the intersection, found it easier to veer off to the right a couple hundred feet before the proposed intersection and pass in front of the houses to the east. In this manner a very large heater piece was formed and became the center of Newtown’s first Historic District.

A variation of this pattern is the heater piece formed at a “Y” intersection. A good example is on Obtuse Road where it joins Newbury Road just below the Brookfield border.



Here the traffic flowing north grew impatient and rather than going to the point of intersection, turned east to get to Newbury Road more quickly, leaving a triangular heater piece between the two upright strokes of the Y.



Yet another variation can be seen in the heater piece that formed at the south end of Palestine Road where it intersected with Hundred Acres and Platt’s Hill roads. As the three roads came together, traffic cut the corner to whichever road was intended to be traveled creating a triangular, heavily vegetated parcel of land that actually has full grown trees anchoring its sod.

On a casual spring afternoon I was able to visit seven of these old traffic fossils, but with a little searching I am sure many more can be found in Newtown alone. I will leave this as a challenge and actively record the ones that you find and make known to me through Patch Comments at <http://newtown.patch.com>.



Captions (top to bottom): The heater piece at the intersection of Borough Lane and Rt.#25 looking west. The Hattertown green looking north from Hi Barlow Rd., a classic but large heater piece.

A very small heater piece at the north end of Palestine Rd. where it joins Boggs Hill Rd., looking north. Photos courtesy of Daniel Cruson