

# Chapter 5

## Historic and Cultural Resources



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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

A plan for Littleton's future requires a look to the past. This chapter focuses on the important historic and cultural features that define Littleton's character and quality of life. As we plan for the future these significant sites and structures should be considered an integral part of the community because they cannot be replaced. Preservation opportunities that are passed by may be lost forever.



The historic and cultural resources that remain in Littleton help define the fabric and character of the community. They are unique to Littleton and tell a story to residents and visitors alike. Often taken for granted by those who have grown accustomed to their presence, these simple homes, agricultural buildings, commercial structures and landscapes retain a sense of place and identity that is Littleton. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some background on important sites and structures in Littleton, and to promote future preservation activities.

### 2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Among the New Hampshire charters granted by Colonial Governor Benning Wentworth, was one for a northern wilderness area he called Chiswick, after an ancient parish on the north bank of the Thames River in London. This charter, granted in 1764, lapsed for lack of activity and was succeeded by another in 1770 for Apthorp, granted by Governor John Wentworth, bearing the name of George Apthorp, a London merchant. Apparently not interested in the 400-acre tract given to him, Apthorp never bothered to pay the taxes on it. In 1773 Apthorp had a total population of fourteen, and in 1782 only "nine polls were counted."

The Town made little progress during its first ten years of existence. The first Town Meeting was held on July 19, 1787. Robert Charlton, the first schoolmaster, was elected Town Clerk, and for the first time Littleton could be called a municipality. The foundation for the modern village was laid in 1797 when Soloman Mann erected a sawmill and a gristmill at the Ammonoosuc Falls, just below the present Cottage Street Bridge.

The Town had at least one natural advantage, a favorable crossroads location. With the arrival of the steam locomotive in August of 1853 and improvement of local transportation routes, Littleton moved from an agricultural to a manufacturing based economy. The development of

the Town as a mercantile center, growth in the population and expansion of the tourist industry established Littleton's place as a regional commercial center in northern New Hampshire during the mid-1800's.

In 1894 the voters decided to purchase the lot at the corner of Main and Cottage Streets to erect the Town's Municipal Building. The building still stands today much as it did in 1894 accommodating the Police Department, Historical Society Museum, and the Opera House which still attracts community functions.

As in all prosperous communities, Littleton attracted a variety of socio-economic classes of people. The mixture of people brought to Littleton the leaders, the workers, and the social reformers who actively fought for change and the future development of the Town. This spirit makes Littleton a community responsive to the pressures of change.

The preceding Brief History of Littleton was based on information taken from the publication, *Littleton: Crossroads of Northern New Hampshire*, John Colby, Ed. 1984. For a more detailed overview of Littleton's History, please refer to the above document.

### **3.0 SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Historic and cultural resources are structures, sites, objects, properties, or districts which have a special historical, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic value. These resources are defined by a uniqueness to the town and townspeople, areas within Littleton that make it special to those who visit and those who make their homes here.

There are currently several lists of significant resources in Littleton that have been created by different groups. Unfortunately, a thorough inventory of such resources has not been conducted on behalf of the community. Property names that appear in italics have been included on more than one list.

#### **3.1 National Register Properties**

Properties in Littleton listed on the National Register of Historic Places include *Thayer's Hotel* (1849-50), *Post Office* (1932), *Town Building* (1894), Edward H. Lane House (16 Cottage Street).

#### **3.2 Littleton Area Historical Society Inventory**

The Littleton Area Historical Society maintains a list of historic sites in the town. Local Buildings considered important for protection include the *Community House* (1884), *Thayer's Hotel* (1849-50), the *Town Building* (1895), the *Methodist Church* (1850), the Congregational Church (1832), *Tilton's Opera Block* (1881), the *Solomon Block* (1912), the Harrington Block (1897), the *Kilburn Block* (1900), the *Carnegie Library* (1906), the "Northern Lights" or Brackett Block (1833), the *Post Office* (1932), and the *Masonic Temple* (1908), all located on Main Street.

Off Main Street buildings would include the "Kilburn" House on South Street formerly owned by Sylvester Marsh, inventor of the Cog Railway, and later Benjamin Kilburn Brothers stereo view fame (1840); the "Kilburn" apartments (1873), the *Lane House* (1812?), the Beverly Kennedy House (1890's), the "Ola Veazie" house (18?), the railroad station (19?), and the Brackett House Restaurant (1841?) all on Cottage Street; the Beal House (1833), the "Bigelow" House(1834), the brick "Cyrus Young" House (1820), and Arlene Strong's House (1838-40) on West Main Street; the Peter Cyr House (18?) and the "1895 House" on Pleasant Street; the "Josiah Kilburn" House (1825) on Mann's Hill; the Episcopal Church (1875) and Thomas Pancoast House (1890's) on School Street; the Catholic Church (1913) on High Street; the Robert Campbell House (1778), the Hubert Merrill House (1791), and the Parker House (1790's) on the Lisbon Road; and the Highland Croft (1837), and the "Lincoln Adam's" Farm on the Partridge Lake Road.

There are also many other buildings, on and off of Main Street, that are considered historically significant, but have not been included in this list.

### *Littleton Area Historical Society Interview – October 2003*

The Historical Society possesses a wealth of information and an impressive collection of materials. The following list of documents related to structures is the product of an interview with members of the Historical Society in October of 2003.

Historic Glimpses of a North Country Community – Littleton, NH. Mildred Lakeway, 1975.  
History of Littleton, NH. James R. Jackson, 1905.  
Littleton Centennial 1884. Town of Littleton NH.  
Littleton – Crossroads of Northern New Hampshire. John H. Colby, 1984.  
Littleton NH – Images of America. Arthur F. March Jr.  
Littleton NH in the White Mountains. Littleton Chamber of Commerce, 1921.  
Mill Street – Solomon Mann's First Gristmill (Historical Society Folder)  
Parker Homestead at Meadow View Farm 1802. (Historical Society Folder)  
Picturesque and Progressive – Littleton and the White Mountains. Paul R. Clay, 1976.  
Underground Railroad – Carleton House. (Historical Society Folder)  
Victorian Homes 1900. (Historical Society Folder)  
Structures with Historic Date Markers, 1975. (Historical Society Folder)

### **3.3 Downtown Littleton Resources**

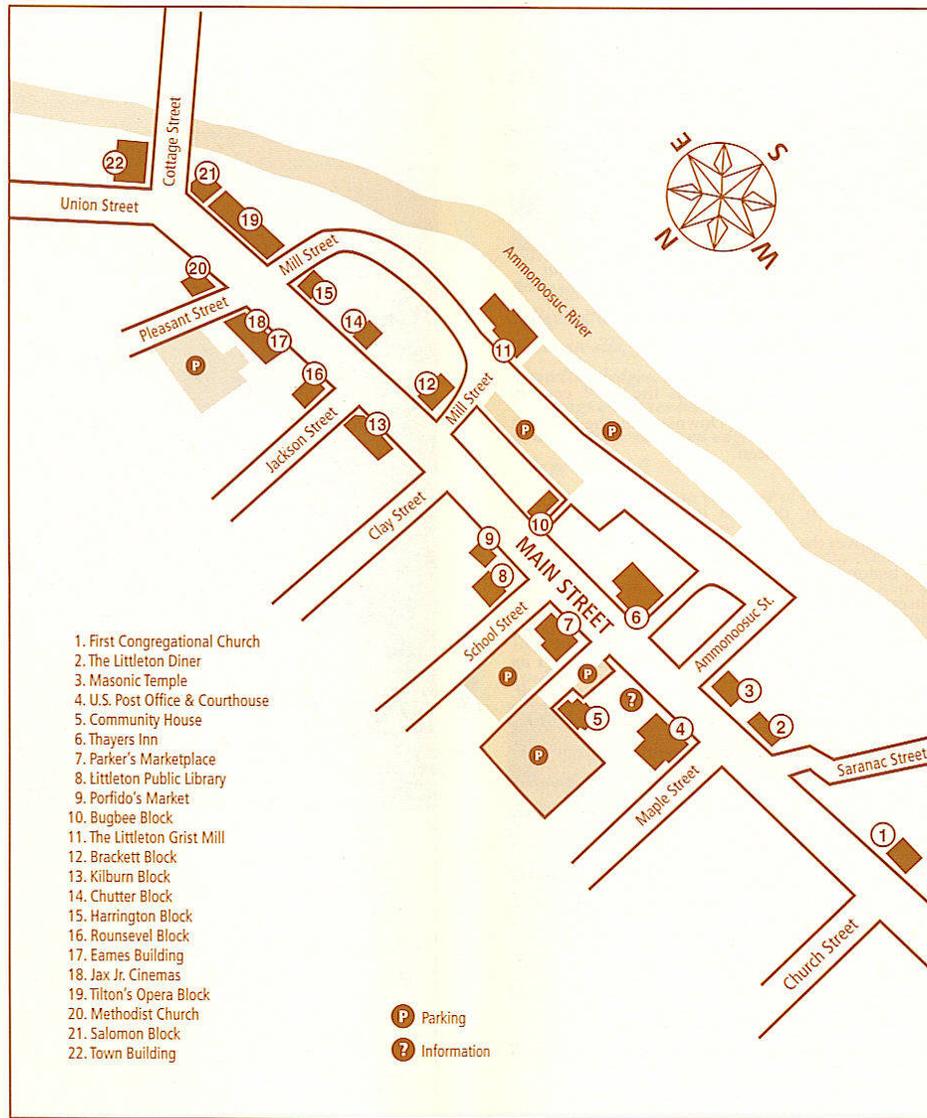
Littleton Main Street Inc. created a walking tour of some of the community's historic sites in 2001. A pamphlet was also created and includes a map of the sites and a narrative describing the history of the buildings. Historic plaques have been placed on each of the buildings included in the tour. Littleton Main Street Inc. compiled the list and it can be found in Table 5A. The walking tour map has been included as Figure 5B.

**Table 5A - 22 Historically Significant Sites on Downtown Walking Tour**

1. <i>First Congregational Church</i>
2. Littleton Diner
3. <i>Masonic Temple</i>
4. <i>US Post Office/Courthouse</i>
5. <i>Community House</i>
6. <i>Thayers Inn</i>
7. Parker's Marketplace
8. <i>Littleton Public Library</i>
9. Porfido's Market
10. Bugbee Block
11. The Littleton Grist Mill
12. Brackett Block
13. <i>Kilburn Block</i>
14. Chutter Block
15. <i>Harrington Block</i>
16. Rounsevel Block
17. Eames Building
18. Jax Jr. Cinemas
19. <i>Tilton's Opera Block</i>
20. <i>Methodist Church</i>
21. <i>Salomon Block</i>
22. <i>Town Building</i>

Source: Littleton Main Street Inc. 2001





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### 3.4 Other Historic and Cultural Features

The following list was compiled during the preparation of the Littleton Natural Resources Inventory in 2003.

1. Historic Granite Quarry used for foundations of many original buildings
2. Littleton Outing Cub Ski Jump Landing Hill
3. Littleton Outing Club Summit Building/Dam Remains-Parker Mountain
4. Historic Roadside Markers (Route 302)
5. Horse Cemetery (Mt Eustis Road)
6. Dells Recreation Area
7. Mt Eustis
8. Pine Hill Trails

9. Scenic Outlook-Kilburn Crags
10. Scenic Outlook-Summit Parker Hill
11. Scenic View I-93 (southbound)

### **3.5 Public Art**

Littleton is fortunate to have a number of sculptures for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. The most recent public art sculpture is Pollyanna. Others in Littleton include General Grant and Joan of Arc.

#### *Pollyanna*

Littleton's jubilant bronze sculpture tributes hometown author, Eleanor H. Porter (1868 – 1920) best remembered as the creator of the world's most optimistic character, *Pollyanna*, 1913. Eleanor Hodgman Porter's early residence was in Littleton, and not so far from the Library front lawn...where fittingly Pollyanna, Littleton's sculpture presides in an artistic and symbolic place "welcoming residents and visitors."

## **4.0 PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES**

These 58 identified sites and structures are specific to Littleton. Therefore, it is in the interest of the Town to work to preserve them. The Town owes its individuality to these sites. Preserving them will help to preserve Littleton's sense of place.

Most historic preservation work is undertaken by private individuals and groups. The Littleton Area Historical Society was formed in 1967 and is housed in the Opera House. The Society is a valuable asset to the community and could play an important role in future preservation activities.

On other occasions groups have formed to rally around a specific property such as the Opera House and Highland Croft, but little progress has been made toward the permanent protection and restoration of these and other significant structures.

### **4.1 Heritage Commission**

Another preservation tool that the Town could pursue is the establishment of a Heritage Commission. This provides a body for the Town to use to recognize, identify and preserve historic and cultural resources within the community. Heritage Commissions are allowed under New Hampshire RSA 674:44-a. Such a commission could be a valuable resource to town boards and citizens. One significant task for such a commission would be the survey and inventory of historic and cultural resources town wide.

### **4.2 Historic and Cultural Resources Survey**

The most significant preservation technique is documentation. This is an essential strategy, and

there are many reasons for undertaking such a survey. In addition to providing a permanent written and photographic record of the community's resources, a good inventory is the foundation for other preservation tools. Although a comprehensive inventory has not been conducted in Littleton there are an array of useful information sources available (see Section 3 in this chapter).

### **4.3 National Register of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's resources worthy of preservation. The Register lists properties of local, state, and/or national significance in the areas of American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. Resources may be nominated individually, or in groups, as districts or as multiple resource areas and must generally be at least 50 years old. Listing on the Register can make a property eligible for certain federal tax benefits, but does not interfere with a property owner's right to alter, manage, dispose of or even demolish their property unless federal funds are involved. National Register listing can be an important step toward changing public perception and increasing historic awareness, but cannot alone prevent detrimental alterations or alterations. However, it remains an important first step toward historic awareness, respect and protection.

### **4.4 Local Historic Districts**

The term "historical district" refers to a district established by Town Meeting vote, or to a National Register Historic District. Both are useful preservation tools but differ in how they are established and the protection they provide. An historic district may also be both locally and nationally designated. Under State Law (NH RSA 674:45) communities may establish a local district for the purpose of protecting and preserving areas of outstanding architectural and historic value from inappropriate alterations and additions that might detract from the distinctive character. Unlike zoning which focuses on land use, an historic district emphasizes exterior appearance and setting. Historic district regulations also differ from site plan review regulations because they allow officials to exercise authority over single family dwellings within the district. It is important to note that buildings alone should not comprise a district. Effective district preservation should involve streetscapes, landscapes, and viewsheds to truly be effective.

### **4.5 Historic Building Rehabilitation Federal Tax Credits**

The rehabilitation of older buildings is often a cost-effective solution benefiting the tax base while filling older structures with new life. Several federal programs have been available over the years to encourage rehabilitation of older structures rather than demolition and replacement by new construction. In certain cases, to be eligible for a federal tax credit program, a building must be a certified historic structure on the National Register, or contribute to a National Register or certified local district. Unfortunately these tax credits do not cover privately owned, non-income producing residences. Larger structures with income producing potential could benefit from the use of these credits. This would also insure the sympathetic rehabilitation of these buildings.

## **4.6 Historic Markers**

Markers are a relatively easy, inexpensive way to tell the story of significant people, places, and events in Littleton's history. A few markers already exist along Route 302 in Littleton. These markers are a result of the State Marker Program which is one alternative for erecting markers designating events, people, and places of historical significance to the State of New Hampshire. Another type of marker is the placement of wooden date markers on buildings. This was done in Littleton in 1975 by the Littleton Area Historical Society. For each property owner that purchased a wooden date marker for their structure the Littleton Area Historical Society researched the history of that structure. The research was compiled into a book that is available at the Historical Society Museum.

The sole purpose of markers is recognition. Markers are not intended to be restrictive. They do not protect historic sites, and do not obligate owners in any way. Large place markers are often used to identify historic sites that have changed considerably over time, or to commemorate events for which there is no standing evidence. Events may include anything that has historical or cultural significance to the community. Littleton could also initiate a marker program using granite blocks or inscribed stones to draw attention to its rich historical and cultural resources.

## **4.7 Easements**

Preservation easements have proven to be an effective tool for protecting historic properties nationwide. An architectural easement such as this protects the exterior appearance of a building. Easements provide property owners with two important benefits. First, the character of the building is protected in perpetuity. Secondly, the donation of an easement may make the owner eligible for certain tax advantages. Easements are also extremely valuable to the community. The costs of acquiring easements may be significantly lower than buying property outright, particularly when easements can be acquired by donation. Significant resources remain in private hands, but are protected from inappropriate alteration. The organization holding the easement is given the right to review any proposed changes to the structure or property. If administered properly, easements are a superior method of conserving and protecting significant resources.

## **4.8 Archeological Resource Protection**

Preservation of archeological sites is extremely challenging. These resources are more difficult to identify and protect than historic structures. Each site is unique and extremely fragile. Unlike many other significant resources, identification of sites and public awareness around these resources often threatens their existence. Rapid growth is the greatest threat to archeological resources. If a development project is funded with federal funds there will be a review of impacts to cultural resources. Development of sites with private funds does not require an archeological evaluation, but local officials should consult with the NH Division of Historic Resources if a proposal will impact a known archeological resource or a high probability area.

## 5.0 LAND USE IMPLICATIONS AND POTENTIAL ACTIONS

### Land Use Implications

Littleton's historical and cultural resources have a direct impact on the character of the community and provide the best link to the region's past. Here are a few items to consider related to the historic and cultural resources in Littleton:

- 1) Historic and cultural resources are critical to the Town's tourism industry and contribute to the quality of life in Littleton.
- 2) These resources add a sense of place that could not be replaced by new construction.
- 3) Renovating these structures tastefully protects the character of the community and has less of an environmental impact than demolition and new construction.

### Potential Actions

*There are an array of possible actions the Town may want to consider pursuing as it evaluates the value and extent of historic and cultural resources in Littleton and their land use implications. This section will be used to identify the specific actions for Littleton to take upon completion of the master plan.*

- 1) Conduct a thorough inventory of all existing historic and cultural resources in Littleton. The first step could be developing a GIS map and list of existing structures by time period.
- 2) Consider designation of an historic district, either locally or nationally, in the downtown area to raise awareness, respect, opportunities for protection and rehabilitation, and promote the character of the area..