

Chapter 4: Historic and Cultural Resources

This chapter inventories Acton's existing historic and cultural resources. Historic and cultural resources include both physical resources (buildings, landscape features, landscapes, and archaeological sites) as well as non-physical resources such as organizations, clubs, programs, and traditions, both of which contribute to the Town's quality of life. This chapter includes:

- Relationship of Historic and Cultural Resources to Planning Goals
- Inventory information:
 - A brief history of Acton and an overview of the Town's extant historic resources.
 - A description of the many historic and cultural organizations based in the Town.
 - A synopsis of the historic and cultural resource preservation efforts completed to date.
- A list of Opportunities and Challenges posed by existing Historic and Cultural Resources conditions.

Why Acton's Existing Historic and Cultural Resources are Important to the Comprehensive Plan

Acton's many historic and cultural resources are important and valued attributes that help establish the character of the Town and past efforts to preserve, promote, and enhance them attest to their value to residents.

Relationship of Historic and Cultural Resources to Planning Goals

Goal: Preserve and Enhance Town Character

While much of Acton has been developed since 1950, its character still owes much to its historic and cultural resources. Many of these resources are concentrated around what were Acton's Villages. Many historic and cultural resources outside of the villages maintain a visible connection with Acton's rural and agricultural past. Preservation and enhancement of the village character will depend on careful design and sympathetic redevelopment. Design is also key to enhancing the character of newer sections of the Town as development occurs in former rural areas.

Goal: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

One of the basic tenets of sustainability is to reuse and adapt existing buildings rather than build new and destroy. At the same time the smaller lots in and around Acton's villages could accommodate sympathetic development without consuming land resources and natural habitat and reduce commuting times often associated with disperse development.

Goal: Improve Connections

The historic villages were established in a time when walking and rail transportation predominated and connections were not dependent upon the private automobile. Today, sidewalks are being built to accommodate increased interest in walking, and discontinued rail rights-of-way are now being converted into rail-trails. A town-wide system of trails, sidewalks, public transportation, and roadways based on these historic resources can help improve connections.

Goal: Enable Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity was a feature of many of the historic resource areas where businesses, diverse housing sizes and types, and industry coexisted. Maintaining and adapting these historic areas is an opportunity to enhance town character. Attractively designed, mixed-use villages with a diversity of housing types and businesses can also enable inclusion and diversity.

Goal: Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation

Cultural traditions bring residents together to celebrate the community. Many of the existing gathering places are located in historic surroundings, several of them owned by the Town. There are also opportunities for creating new places within these historic areas.

Goal: Maintain and Enhance Town Assets

The Town assets include its historic neighborhoods, buildings, landscapes, and other cultural resources. Failure to maintain and enhance these historic and cultural resources would have a major impact on the Town's character.

Goal: Maintain and Improve the Financial Well-being of the Town

Acton's historic and cultural assets make the Town more desirable as a place to live and do business; the development which is attracted by these resources is likely to be of high quality and may contribute more to the Town's fiscal well-being than it consumes in services.

Summary of Key Points

History

- Native Americans pre-settled the area for hunting, fishing, gathering, and some agriculture – especially around Nagog Pond.
- Concord shepherds settled the area that would become Acton (in 1655) because of its prime grazing lands.
- Mills were developed on Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook as early as 1670 – several mill sites remain.
- In 1735, Acton incorporated as a town and a meeting house was built in Acton Center.
- Railroads came in 1843 with stations in South Acton and West Acton that became village centers; A branch line connected South Acton with Marlborough in the 1850s, and by the 1870s another rail line went through East Acton and North Acton.
- By 1900, the population in the 5 villages was 2,120, and apples were the major export.
- In 1925 Acton population was large enough to sustain its own high school.
- In 1950, there were 3,500 people, and apples were still important, but by 1974 the population had reached 17,000 people, as orchards and fields turned into subdivisions – with some concentration around three villages: South Acton, Acton Center, and West Acton.

Historic Resources

- The 2006 Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory report for Acton lists Conant Farm, Grassy Pond, Miller Farm/Station Master's House, Nagog Pond, Nashoba Brook, Rt. 2 Gateway Agricultural Fields, South Acton Village, Stonefield/Simeone Farm, and Wetherbee Street Woods as priority landscapes in need of preservation. Many more local heritage landscapes were also identified by participants in the public sessions leading up to the report.

- The three Local Historic Districts centered on the villages of Acton Center, South Acton, and West Acton were designated by Town Meeting vote in 1990.
- Historic stone walls contribute greatly to the Town's character. Many are partially protected by Acton's existing Scenic Roads Bylaw.

Cultural Resources

- Acton boasts a culturally diverse population.
- Several cultural organizations sponsor a variety of events each year.
- Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council and Acton Recreation Department list a variety of cultural events – ethnic, musical, film festivals, theatre, arts and crafts, storytelling, and dance.
- Theatre III, the Theatre with a Twist, and the Open Door Theater are non-profits dedicated to promoting the performing arts through education and high-quality, reasonably priced performances.
- The Acton Recreation Department hosts a long schedule of events, most at NARA Park, throughout the year.
- Acton Memorial Library hosts an active schedule of events and community meetings including storytelling, book discussions, historic site explorations, musical events, movies, English language conversation groups, art exhibits, computer training, etc.
- Several of Acton's churches and a number of businesses host cultural events.

Acton's History¹

Prior to its settlement by farmers from Concord the central highlands at the headwaters of the Assabet River and Nashoba Brook, present-day Acton, were frequented by Nipmuck-related Native Americans who may have practiced some limited agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering. Many areas of Acton were good campsites especially areas along Nashoba and Fort Pond Brooks as well as Nagog Pond. Proven settlements go back at least 7,000 years, to the Pine Hawk site near where the Assabet River briefly enters Acton. Trails for these activities are conjectured to have followed corridors from the Concord River along Fort Pond Brook and possibly along the routes of School/Central/ Summer Streets through South Acton with possible branches south along Liberty Street and north along Central Street. Another trail followed Nashoba Brook to Nagog Pond along Great Road with possible loops at Esterbrook and Davis Roads, with likely branches along Strawberry Hill and Main Street/Carlisle Road. Artifacts from early hunting and fishing villages have been found in Acton, especially in the area of Nagog Pond. Diseases, brought by early European explorers in the 1600s, decimated these native populations.

Nearly all of present day Acton's 12,990 acres is composed of portions of four early land grants. The two largest were: Major Simon Willard's Grant (known as Iron Work Farm), and the New Grant or Concord Village. Next to these grants was the praying Indian Township of Nashoba Plantation, present day Littleton. Seven of these "praying Indian townships" were set up by the General Court of Massachusetts in 1646 as a recognition of the success of Reverend John Eliot's efforts to Christianize the Native Americans.

¹ Adapted from "A Short History of the Town of Acton, Acton Historical Society, 1974.
(<http://www.actonhistoricalsociety.org/>)

The early landscape included large areas of meadows. These prime grazing lands were the reason Concord sought to annex these additional lands in 1655. The earliest European settler was John Law, Concord's shepherd, who built his home in 1656 on School Street near Lawsbrook Road. John Shepherd who was granted land by Concord to build his house near Hosmer Street joined Law in 1661. Capt. Thomas Wheeler built his house in 1668 near the intersection of present-day Concord Road and Alcott Street, under a lease from the town of Concord to herd their cattle. By 1670 he had also built a grist mill on Nashoba Brook.

The Iron Work Farm was worked in the manner of a plantation to support those employed at the iron works, which had been established in 1658 in what is now West Concord. The farm had at least three families living on it in 1684. The Knight-Forbush house, on Martin Street built in 1710, and the adjacent Stonefield Farm lie within the bounds of the original Iron Work Farm.

By 1730 there were at least two-dozen settlers scattered across the Town. The proprietors of Concord Village or the New Grant proceeded to divide their lands among the proprietors. The records of the proprietors' clerk give a picture of the Acton landscape from around 1730 until 1780 when the last lots were divided.

Partly because of the difficulty of attending services at the Concord meetinghouse, Acton was incorporated as a separate town in 1735. A meetinghouse was built in the center of town with roads coming from the outlying farms. Early industry included the mills on Fort Pond Brook in South Acton, as early as 1701; the forge on Nashoba Brook below Ice House Pond in 1728; and at least four mills along Nashoba Brook as early as 1738. Portions of these mill sites are still in existence. A number of sites are located in the Nashoba Brook Conservation Area including the Robbins Mill Pond Dam, which was repaired by the Town in 1990.

Although Acton was primarily an agricultural community in its early days, sawmills, and gristmills were necessities. The manufacture of barrels to store and ship foodstuffs became the first light industry. It continued into the early 1900s, as young birch trees became hoopoles for Florida citrus crates. A woolen industry centered on the Faulkner Mills, said to have been one of the first large-scale manufacturers of woolen cloth in this country. Parts of that original mill still exist.

In 1835 the powder mills were started on the Acton/Concord/Maynard (then Sudbury) line, and continued to operate into the 1940s. The dam on Old High Street has been repaired and is generating electricity again. In 1848 a pencil factory opened on Nashoba Brook at Brook Street, an outgrowth of the Thoreau family's pencil businesses in Concord; continuing in use until 1888. Another pencil factory was located further upstream. 1843 brought the railroad to Acton, with the Fitchburg Railroad line running through South and West Acton. Only with the arrival of the railroad did the villages really begin to grow, especially West Acton Village. It was not until after the Civil War that a railroad finally went through East and North Acton. The rail beds remain today and are possible locations for proposed rail-trails.

The 1870s brought several other industries to Acton; a piano stool factory (later to be Merriam's) on Fort Pond Brook in South Acton, Hall Brothers pail and churn factory and the Knowlton cigar factory both located in West Acton. Hall Brothers cut the trees from local woodlots for their products, which were shipped, across the country.

Quarrying was done in Acton throughout the 1800s but did not become a major industry until the 1880s. The Harris quarry, one of several in North Acton, was noted for its "slickened sides"

granite. This was formed by faults in the ledge that rubbed together, heating and forming a polished look. The final product had a look similar to a light green and beige marble. Earlier times saw small scale field quarrying being done by the farmers to cut fence posts and foundation stones. Many examples of this can be found scattered through the woods, one such example is located near a trail at the Arboretum. Some of these small quarries form the upland vernal pools that the Conservation Commission sought to protect with the bylaw changes at the April 1996 Town Meeting.

The 1890s brought a shift in population towards South and West Acton, which caused the precincts and school districts to be realigned. The North and East District Schools were combined into the Center District. Although the districts were officially changed the residents still thought of the villages as East and North Acton.

At the turn of the century Acton was still an agricultural community, with five villages and a population of 2,120. Apples were Acton's main agricultural export being shipped not only to Boston but to Europe. Before modern refrigeration space in the cellar of the Town Hall was auctioned off for storage. Apples were stored in the center of West Acton into the 1950s. Improvements were coming however; a water district was formed in 1912 for West and South Acton; the Center was added later. A town fire department, starting in 1915 with West Acton, replaced the independent fire companies.

1950 marks the shift from apples to houses, with most of the development in the southern half of the Town. There were 3,500 people in Acton in 1950; by 1974 there were 17,000. Much of this growth was facilitated by the construction of regional highways like Rt. 128 and Rt. 2 in the 1950s. Many orchards and open fields turned into subdivisions; although Acton still kept its agricultural ties with apples being a major crop into the 1960s. The town population was then concentrated in three villages; Acton Center, West Acton and South Acton. The form of government would eventually change to the current Town Manager -Board of Selectmen - Open Town Meeting form.

Until 1925 Acton sent its high school students to the Concord High School. In 1925, Acton's population was large enough to sustain its own high school, which was built on Massachusetts Avenue near the intersection of Main Street. The building, which still stands, was converted into use as an elementary school and currently sits vacant waiting conversion into residential housing. In 1957, Acton and Boxborough created a regional school district for grades 7-12. The Merriam School was constructed in 1958. Other schools quickly followed; Douglas 1966, Gates 1968, and Conant 1971. In 1967 a building was constructed for the Junior High. In 1973 a huge addition was added to this building and it became the high school. The junior high school moved to the old high school building.

Rapid growth in the 1960s and 70s also stimulated efforts to preserve Acton's historic and natural resources and to increase restrictions on future development. Open space and recreation land was set aside through gift and acquisition, and the Historical Commission inventoried many of the Town's historic buildings. A Historic District Study Committee was formed and proposed the creation of the three current historic districts, which were approved in a 1990 Special Town Meeting.

The 1990 Comprehensive Community Plan proposed to revitalize the former villages of North and East Acton and rebuild their village character. Both the North Acton Recreation Area,

opened in 1999, and Ice House Pond are located in close proximity to these village centers. In addition, the North Acton Recreation Area became the Town's major recreation facility.

Further information on the history of Acton can be found in the History of the Town of Acton, by Harold R. Phalen, 1954; and A Brief History of Acton, Acton Historical Society, 1974. Acton's Historic Properties Inventory, updated in 1990 through a Survey and Planning Grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and presently being updated with Community Preservation funds, is a source of information on some of the older historic resources in town. The early proprietors' records and many other papers and photographs on Acton are available for research in the collection of the Acton Historical Society.

Inventory of Acton's Historical Resources

The Acton Historical Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission maintain the inventory of Acton's historical/cultural resources. Acton has 17 ancient Native American sites dating back to the Middle Archaic Period (8,000-6,000 B.P.) and four historic archaeological sites. One of the ancient Native American sites has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register. Due to the known information about other regions as well as the apparent Native American activity in Acton, it is likely that there will be more pre-historic and historic (post European Settlement) archaeological sites identified in the future.

Many of the historical resources are concentrated in Acton's three local historic districts that are centers of "villages" that developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Regulations to preserve the character of these areas were established in 1990 with the enactment of Local Historic Districts in Acton Centre, South Acton, and West Acton. They require approval of most changes to the exterior appearance of a building or site within the districts. The district regulations are administered by the Acton Historic District Commission and may be found at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=360>.

Acton's Local Historic Districts

Acton Center

The Acton Centre Local Historic District is located at the intersection of Concord Road and Main Street. It covers both sides of Main Street from the Acton Arboretum (Taylor Road) to just beyond Nagog Hill Road. It includes the Common, Davis Monument (memorial to Acton deaths in the Concord Battle at the beginning of the Revolutionary War), Town Hall, the Memorial Library, Acton Centre Store, Fire Station, and the Congregational Church as well as several residences. It has been the Town's civic center since the first meeting-house was built in the 1700s.

Acton Centre was also designated a National Register District in 1983, with 39 resources included. The Acton Centre Local Historic District



Figure 4.1: Acton Town Hall

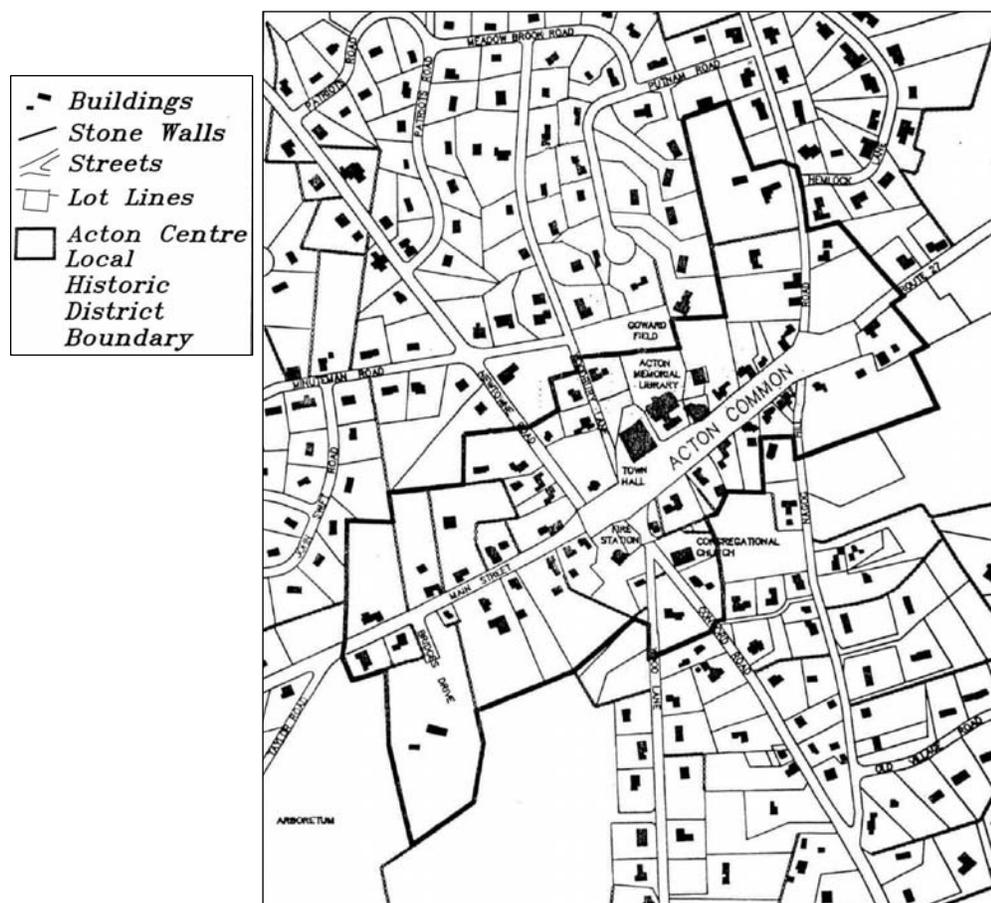
Historic and Cultural Resources

includes all or part of 54 parcels and is zoned for mostly residential uses.

The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System of the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MACRIS) lists more than 49 buildings, structures, and sites within the district that are on both the State Register of Historic Places and the Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth, including:

- Abner Hosmer House
- John Fletcher House
- George L Noyes Grocery Store
- Samuel Law House
- Deacon John Fletcher House
- The Old Parsonage
- Samuel Chaffin House
- Jones Blacksmith Shop Site

Figure 4.2: Acton Centre Local Historic District



The Isaac Davis Trail, a National Register Historic Property (listed in 1972) used by the Acton Minutemen on April 19, 1775, runs through the district on its way to North Bridge in Concord and is the route of a reenactment of the march each year.

South Acton

The South Acton Local Historic District is located at the intersection of School Street and Main Street in South Acton Village. It extends along School Street to Chadwick Street and also along River Street to Haley Lane. It includes the Faulkner Homestead (1707), Faulkner Mills-Erikson Grain Mill sites, Exchange Hall (recently renovated), and the Jones Tavern and several residences and commercial buildings. It is near the South Acton Commuter Rail Station.

Figure 4.4: South Acton Local Historic District



South Acton was the center of much of the Town's early commercial and industrial life. It was part of the Iron Work Farm grant and many of the early mills developed along Fort Pond Brook. Its place as a commercial center was strengthened with the coming of the railroad in 1843.

This portion of South Acton was designated a Local Historic District in 1991 and includes all or part of 77 parcels and has a variety of land uses and zoning districts.

The MACRIS inventory lists more than 58 buildings, structures or sites within the district, including:

- Amos and Charles Brooks Wheelwright Shop

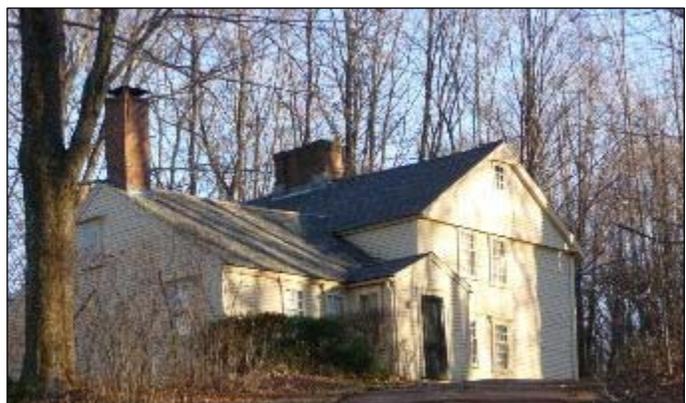


Figure 4.3: Faulkner Homestead

Historic and Cultural Resources

- John J. Lathrop Blacksmith Shop
- Central Hall/Old Post Office
- Jones Cider Mill
- J. A. Holmes and Company Woolen Mill Office
- Winthrop Faulkner Double House

West Acton

The West Acton Local Historic District is located at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue (Route 111) and Arlington Street and is part of West Acton Village. It extends along Massachusetts Avenue and along Windsor Avenue. West Acton is an important commercial area of town, consisting of several commercial developments centered along Route 111. It developed in response to the growth of the Fitchburg Railroad in the 19th century. The West Acton Station was located on land now occupied by New London Pizza. The West Acton District includes the Citizen's Library, an 1840 Greek Revival cape; the Minuteman Building, originally the West Acton Fire Station built in 1903; mill workers apartments built in about 1900; and several 19th Century Victorian residences along Windsor Avenue.

This portion of West Acton was designated a Local Historic District in 1991 and includes all or part of 75 parcels and has a variety of land uses and zoning districts.

The MACRIS inventory lists more than 59 buildings, structures or sites within the district, including:

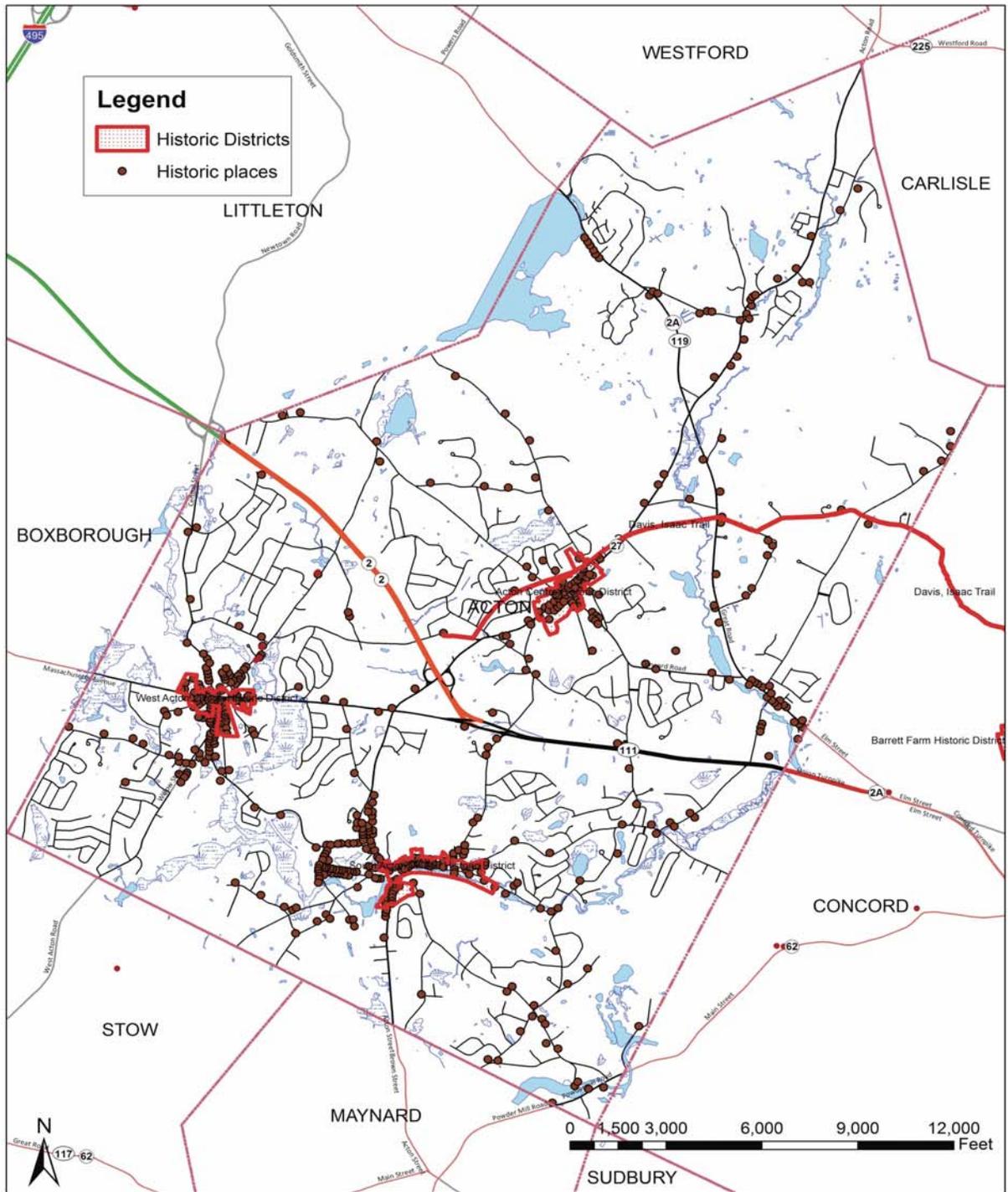
- Isaac Davis House & Market
- West Acton Universalist Church
- Oliver W. Mead House
- George Gardner House
- St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church
- West Acton Fire Station

Figure 4.5: West Acton Local Historic District



Complete listings of Acton’s historic cultural resources may be found in the Acton Historical Commission’s “Cultural Resource List” (<http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=373>) and also through the search capability of the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (<http://mhc-macris.net/index.htm>).

Figure 4.6: Historic Resources



The Map of Historic Resources (Figure 4.6) shows the Existing Local Historic Districts, the Isaac Davis Trail, National Register Properties outside the districts and the historic places listed in the Acton Historical Commission's and Massachusetts Cultural Resources inventory lists.

Historical and Cultural Organizations and Traditions

Various town boards and departments are involved in the preservation of the town's historic resources. Acton also has several private, non-profit historical and/or cultural organizations, and holds many cultural traditions:

Acton Historical Commission.

The Historical Commission's purpose is to protect and preserve the Town's cultural character and assets, be they archaeological sites, historic buildings, open spaces, landscapes, or historic districts. The Commission is established under the Town of Acton Charter and by Chapter 40, Section 8d of the Massachusetts General Laws. Its five members are appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The Commission maintains the Cultural Resource list, compiles the inventory of the community's historic assets, and administers a historic maker program to recognize historic structures. It also administers the Town Bylaw Chapter N – Procedures for the Demolition of Historically and Architecturally Significant Buildings (“Demolition Delay Bylaw”), plays an advisory role in regard to development proposals, and can serve as a design resource to property owners who are remodeling older properties.

Historic District Commission (HDC)

The HDC was founded in 1990 under the Town of Acton Charter when the Local Historic Districts were established, and is enable by Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws. Its seven members, appointed by the Board of Selectmen, oversee development and change within the Historic Districts. It is responsible for:

- Preserving the heritage of Acton by protecting the architecture and integrity of the three designated Historic Districts.
- Administering and enforcing the Town's local Historic District Bylaw (Chapter P) which was enacted by the Town in 1990.

Its Rules and Regulations require a Certificate of Appropriateness or Non-Applicability before most changes to the exterior appearance of a building or site within a Historic District. Information about the HDC, rules, regulations and guidelines are available on the Town's website.

Acton Historical Society

The Historical Society is a non-profit organization supported by its members and volunteers. Its objectives are to discover, preserve and perpetuate facts and artifacts concerned with local history, and to make them available to all interested parties. The intention of these objectives is to conserve Acton's heritage by creating an interest in them. It sponsors a variety of events each year including talks on local history, walks, building tours, etc. It



also owns and manages the historic Hosmer House and the Jenks Library at 300 Main Street, housing the Society's collection of historical books and papers.

Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council

Established under the Town of Acton Charter in 1982 the ABCC helps develop cultural programs in Acton and Boxborough. It administers the Massachusetts Cultural Council grant program and sponsors concerts, public art, opera, and a variety of other cultural events.

Acton Recreation Department

The Recreation Department hosts a wide variety of cultural events – ethnic, musical, film festivals, theater, arts & crafts, storytelling, and dance.

Acton Memorial Library

Established in 1890 as a Civil War veteran's memorial by William Allan Wilde and governed by a Board of Trustees, the Acton Memorial Library plays a major role in collecting, displaying, and disseminating cultural information to the Town. In addition to collecting, cataloguing books and periodicals in circulation, the library holds information programs, displays work of local and regional artists, and shares information about its historical collections, including Early Town Records with selectman's minutes with details of pre-Revolutionary life, and Civil War Records, both available on-line. Since 2008 the library has a permanent exhibit "Not Afraid to Go: Acton's Part in the Birth and Preservation of our Nation".

West Acton Citizen's Library

In addition to the main library there is also the West Acton Citizen's Library (The Secret Library). The library hosts an active schedule of events and community meetings including storytelling, book discussions, historic site explorations, musical events, movies, English language conversation groups, art exhibits, computer training, etc.

Cultural Activities

In addition to the established historical/cultural organizations, Acton holds a variety of cultural events that contribute to the sense of tradition and quality of life in the Town. Such happenings include Family Campout, Chinese Culture Day, concerts at NARA Park, Lions Club Fair, July 4th celebration, West Acton Oktoberfest, and Acton Day at NARA Park. Many events celebrate the Town's cultural diversity.

Acton Area Newspapers

Two newspapers provide frequent cultural information to the Town. The Beacon is a community newspaper, published weekly, covering Acton and Boxborough. The Action Unlimited has a weekly Acton/Maynard edition that is delivered to every home in town. Other papers like the Acton Citizen have ceased publication in recent years, but provide historical data for researchers. Online news outlets, like Acton Patch (<http://acton.patch.com>), are also becoming important sources for local news.

Acton Museums

Acton has a variety of museums including the Discovery Museums – a science discovery museum and a children’s’ discovery museum; the Iron Work Farm in Acton is a non-profit, historical corporation founded in 1964 that operates two historic house museums, the Jones Tavern and the Faulkner House; and, as mentioned above, the Acton Historical Society operates the Revolutionary War-era Hosmer House.

Acton Theater Groups

Acton has three active non-profit theater groups, Theatre III, Theatre with a Twist, and the Open Door Theater, that offer a variety of performances and cultural learning opportunities.

The Acton Woman’s Club

Established in 1915, the Acton Woman’s Club owns and maintains the historic building at 504 Main Street in the Acton Centre Historic District. The Club offers ballroom dance classes in the building, sponsors a community supper, offers scholarships to High School seniors, provides fuel assistance to needy residents, and engages in other benevolent and civic activities.

In addition to the cultural organizations listed above many other cultural events and opportunities are available through the schools, churches, and also several private businesses that host cultural events.

Historic and Cultural Resource Preservation Efforts to Date

Acton values and has actively worked to protect its historic and cultural resources. The Historic Districts, historic places, and other cultural resources listed above have been identified for decades as key factors in defining the Town’s character and sense of place. The town established three Local Historic Districts in 1990-91 after an extensive effort to inventory its historic assets. At the same time it adopted the Local Historic District Bylaw. Earlier it had adopted a Demolition Delay Bylaw that applies to areas outside of the historic districts. The Demolition Delay Bylaw has been utilized to delay the demolition of an architecturally or historically significant building for up to six months and work with owners to revise plans to save the building by incorporating it into their plans (Miller Farm – Station Master’s House, 2006).

The Local Historic District Bylaw (Chapter P) was approved unanimously by the fall 1990 Town Meeting. Its purpose “...is to aid in the preservation and protection of the distinctive characteristics and architecture of buildings and places significant in the history of the Town of Acton, the maintenance and improvement of their settings and the encouragement of new building designs compatible with the historically significant architecture existing in the Local Historic District(s) when this Bylaw was first adopted in 1990. This Bylaw does not seek to

establish an architectural museum, but instead to inform concerning the historical process of architectural growth and adaptation to heighten a sense of educated pride in our heritage.” The Bylaw established regulations for review and approval of changes to buildings with the three districts by the Historic District Commission

(<http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=360>).

In 2002, Acton adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), statewide enabling legislation that allows towns to dedicate a portion of property tax revenues to historic preservation, open space and recreation, and affordable housing initiatives and receive matching funds from the state. According to the Community Preservation Coalition Acton has funded 79 projects.

Recent historic preservation projects include:

- Antique fire apparatus restoration,
- Civil War artifacts restoration,
- Davis monument restoration,

Recent historic preservation projects include:

- the preparation of the Massachusetts Historical Commission area form for the Wright Holden Farm off Wetherbee Street;
- the restoration of the historic stone chamber in North Acton; and
- a town-wide archeological reconnaissance survey (CPA funded).

Trail Through Time

Another historic preservation effort is the proposal to develop a heritage trail in North Acton and Carlisle. The trail will connect existing historic sites lying along Nashoba Brook where it flows through the North Acton including the Wheeler Farm complex, the Robbins Mill and dam complex, the Stone Chamber, the Pencil Factory site and sluiceways, and the quarry site for the Stone Chamber’s roof slabs. It will also include pre-colonial sites including certain stone structures located on a swath of landscape sacred to the Native Americans that passes through this region.

Overall Summary of Existing Conditions

As indicated in the preceding sections, Acton’s rich history is well represented by the Town’s three historic districts and by individual houses, other structures, historic landscapes, and stone walls in many parts of town. The Acton Historical Commission and the Acton Historic District Commission have been successful in preserving many of these resources, and with non-profit organizations such as the Historical Society, in educating people as to their importance. Acton also has a diversity of modern cultural resources through the Town’s libraries, churches, museums, theater and cultural societies, groups, and clubs, as well as the Acton Boxborough Cultural Council.

Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Historic and Cultural Resources Conditions

- Public utilities have the potential to overwhelm the character of the villages.
- Efforts to update the inventory of historic resources are continuing.
- Farms that were central to Acton's history are slowly disappearing or are threatened.
- Acton retains many historic barns, reflecting the Town's agricultural past. They represent an opportunity for reuses that would help preserve character. Current measures to ensure their long term protection and productive use may not be adequate.
- Acton's many stonewalls that contribute to the Town's character are often threatened by new development.
- Traffic through the villages has increased and is a threat to the safety of pedestrians and detracts from the appeal of the villages.
- Some development along Massachusetts Avenue, Route 2A/119, and elsewhere does not complement the historic character of Acton.
- Acton's design requirements within the existing zoning regulations (for commercial development) do not always achieve the look and feel desired.
- The town has not developed a strategy for managing technological developments (such as cell towers) and ensuring these developments are implemented in a way consistent with and harmonious with the rural character of the Town.
- Acton has a number of sites of archaeological interest and many have not been researched, documented, and protected from destruction from land development.
- There has been ongoing discussion of expanding the historic districts to include more of the historic resources and revising the design guidelines.
- Much of the historic path of the Line of March (Isaac Davis Trail) is not protected.

In conclusion, historic and cultural resources are strengths of the town and an important ingredient in creating its unique character and supporting diversity. Ongoing effort is needed to preserve the past and to provide opportunities for cultural involvement by all.