

6. Historical & Cultural Resources

6.1 Introduction

The cultural and historical resources of a town built on the cultural and historical heritage of the past and are forged with the present to create the identity of a place. A Town's heritage and identity is a reflection and product of the combined labor, sacrifices, visions, and hopes of its people. Every town is based on the story of its experiences over time, its follies and fortunes, and the townspeople's efforts to accrue the benefits and lessons of each, without being unduly influenced or burdened. Perhaps Ezra Stearn's said it best, more than 130 years ago in his History of Ashburnham, when he wrote:

*"The glory of any town is reflected in the lives of sterling men [and women] whose deeds are the soul of its annals."*¹

Hence, a community's historical heritage and cultural identity is a thoughtful, meaningful, unsolicited gift from its former townspeople, one that is as diverse as the experiences of those who presented it and as unique and revered as the built and natural environments that shaped their experiences and defined the town they called home, the place known as Ashburnham.

Much of the narrative in this section of the chapter was obtained from the Town's official website, Ashburnham's Historical Society and Historical Commission archives, the 2010 Ashburnham Cultural/Creative Economy Plan, the 1984 Mass Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Ashburnham, the Massachusetts Historical Commission's database; Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) along with various other works. Using these resources, this chapter identifies Ashburnham's existing cultural and historic resources as well as the protection and preservation policies in place today. It also looks at policies and goals for the future including recommendations, with the ultimate goal of protecting Ashburnham's cultural and historic resources well into the future.

6.2 History

Native People

Early Ashburnham was shaped first by Native people using natural lakes and developing key footpaths. Native Nipmucs, and Abenaki Pennacooks, Souhegans and Squakheags (from present day Northfield/Royalston) area likely used seasonal sites near natural lakes like Cheshire and Lincoln Ponds. The *MA Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Ashburnham* (MHC, 1984) identifies likely pre-1620 Native American trade routes within "the highland Naukeag Lake area southwest of Wapack Range on upper Whitman River and Millers River tributaries", as well as an "east/west trail south of Naukeag Lakes (conjectured as Russell Hill Road) with a connector to Central Street southwest to Crystal Lake" in Gardner.

¹ Sterns, Ezra. (1887). History of Ashburnham.

Other native footpaths also are referenced that still are used today as town roads².

The documented presence of Native trails in this location makes sense; Ashburnham would have been an important “transportation junction” for native people considering that waterways were the most efficient means of travel and preferred routes of Native people. Ashburnham was situated at the headwaters of three of the region’s rivers, all navigable by canoe, the Nashua, Souhegan, and Pequig (Millers). These rivers lead to two of the most important Native fishing and meeting places in the region – Great Falls (Peskeomskut) on the Connecticut River and Pawtucket Falls, home of the great Bashaba (Sachem of all Sachems), Passaconaway, on the Merrimack River. Both places are known, in name and lore, for their abundance of salmon and as a peaceful gathering place of many different tribes and bands of Native people.³



A documented Native American ceremonial site in Ashburnham was described in 2013 as.

“This site has four enclosures, a Manitou stone with an associated split wedge cairn, at least one cairn group, and several other stone structures. These structures are found in three distinct clusters and can technically be treated as three separate sites. However, the three groups appear to be interrelated and are therefore treated as a single site. The site is located on the upper slopes of the east side of a hill in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. The eastern slope forms a north-south ridge on the west side of a deep valley through which a brook runs.”⁴

The Native Americans presence on the land is remembered in the names of Ashburnham’s rivers, streams, lakes, and mountains and in the ceremonial rock formations they left behind. In Kinnicutt’s 1905 preamble to “Indian Names and Places in Worcester County Massachusetts”, it is stated.

“Your rivers guard our ancient names” and “Your mountains are our monuments”⁵.

This could not be truer than it is in Ashburnham. Today, native place names live on in many of the Town’s landscape features, including Mount Watatic, Naukeag Lakes, Lake Winnekeag, and Souhegan River, among others. Years of uncertain relationships and eventual conflict between the regions native people and English colonizers led to the extirpation of the Nipmuc and Abenaki-Pennecook people and eventual English settlement.

²MA Historical Commission. 1984. *MA Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Ashburnham*. Office of the MA Secretary of State. Boston, MA.

³Price, Chester B. 1967. “Historic Indian Trails of New Hampshire.” *The New Hampshire Archeologist*, 14: 1-33

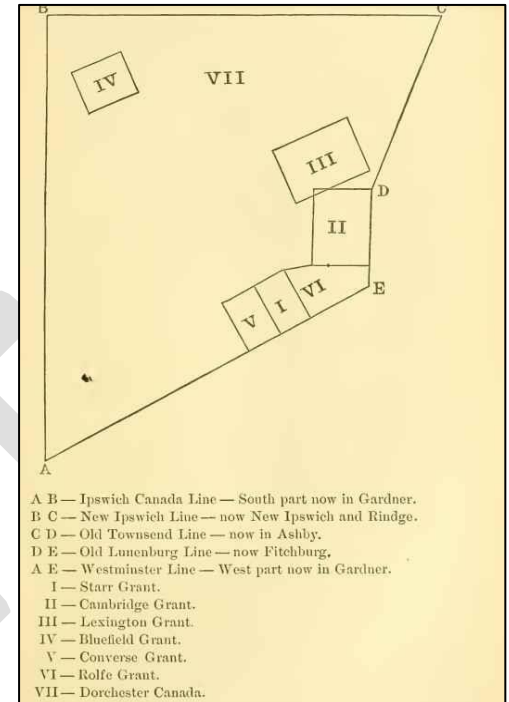
⁴Gage, M. 2013. *Native American Ceremonial Site, Ashburnham Massachusetts*. (Unpublished.)

⁵Kinnicutt, Lincoln N. (1905). *Indian Names of Places in Worcester County Massachusetts with Interpretations* (PDF). http://www.nipmuclanguage.org/uploads/5/0/7/7/50775337/indian_names_worc..pdf

Colonial Settlement

In 1690, the Massachusetts Bay Colony organized an attack on Quebec in retaliation for attacks on areas now known as New York, New Hampshire, and Maine. However, the Canada Expedition failed, and it cost the province more than it could afford so the soldiers were never paid. In 1735, 45 years after the Expedition, the soldiers were finally paid by grant of a 6-miles square unappropriated land lying northwest of Lunenburg known as the “Dorchester-Canada” grant.

In 1737, the Meeting House and a Mill Lots were selected and by 1740, the mill and meeting house were in various stages of completion. Lots were surveyed with bridle paths and tiny roads laid out. By 1761, the issue of the Province Tax began pushing small “Plantations” to incorporate into townships prompting the inhabitants to petition the Governor to incorporate. In 1765, after much strife, the territory was incorporated as Ashburnham by our Royalist Governor, Sir Francis Bernard.



The first official survey of Ashburnham in 1795 shows the only two industries the Pot and Pearl Ashies. Ashburnham’s location on the Central New England Divide and high altitude sends water in all directions providing water to the Merrimack River and the Connecticut River. By the early 1800’s the velocity of the flow sustained enough power to establish tanneries and mills for the manufacture of lumber, tubs and pails, cotton spinning and furniture. Between 1870 and 1880, Ashburnham became the second-largest manufacturer of chairs in the world, behind only its neighbor Gardner.⁶

Location tempered the growth of manufacturing and as the production of chairs declined one industry began to develop; education. Cushing Academy was established in 1875 and has grown into an international institution. Today, in addition to education Ashburnham’s largest asset is open space. As Ezra Stearns wrote in his 1887, History of Ashburnham;

“The altitude of the town and the bold and rugged outlines of the landscape, are the elements of scenery unsurpassed in beauty and grandeur. These features of nature are a living inspiration and enjoyment to all who inhabit here...”⁷

⁶ <https://www.ashburnham-ma.gov/> accessed Oct. 26, 2023

⁷ Stearns, Ezra. (1887). History of Ashburnham.

6.3 Inventory and Documentation

Inventory is a valuable resource in identifying general patterns of recorded history in Ashburnham, and potential opportunities for protection & further study. It is possible to pinpoint informational gaps to help inform future survey priorities and possible threats to as-yet unidentified significant resources. Inventories also consider manmade and natural features that together are significant in telling the story of the development of a town. These landscapes can incorporate scenic and ecological land use patterns as well as community history to tell broad, and often complex stories. The following outlines the National & State inventory process, recorded resources, and local policies in place for their protection.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the American cultural resources identified as worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources.

Properties listed in the National Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. These resources contribute to an understanding of the historical and cultural foundations of the nation.



The National Register includes:

- all historic areas in the National Park System;
- National Historic Landmarks which have been designated by the Secretary of the Interior for their significance to all Americans; and
- properties significant to the nation, state, or community which have been nominated by the states, federal agencies and others and have been approved by the National Park Service.

The structure or site must:

- be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history;
- be associated with the lives of significant persons in the past;
- embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity;
- have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

More details on criteria can be found at:

<https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/pdfs/nrb15.pdf>

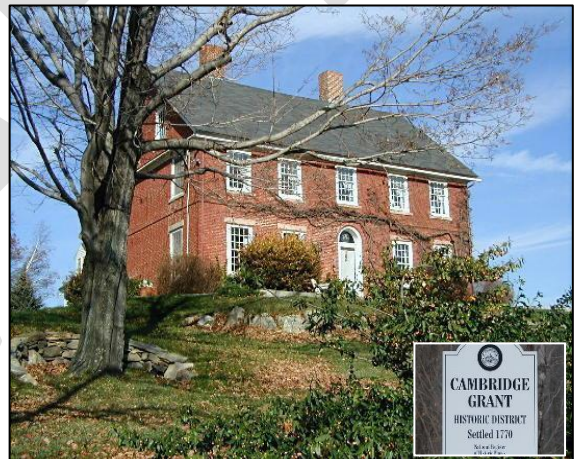
It should be noted that being in the National Register does not impose any restrictions on an owner regarding alterations or use, provided that no federal license, permit, or funding is involved; require owners to open properties to the public or to restore or even maintain them; and require signs, banners, or any other notice declaring that “This is an Historic Place.” Resources on the National Register are automatically added to the respective State Register of Historic Places.

However, Ashburnham voted in a Demolition Delay Bylaw in 1991 that aims to protect structures from being demolished. The Historic Commission enforces the bylaw and must make the determination that the structure is historically significant and preferably preserved. The protection the bylaw provides lasts for six months with the hope that a viable alternative to demolition can be found within that timeframe.

Ashburnham Historic Assets on the National Register of Historic Places:

The **Ashburnham Center Historic District (ASB.A)** is a historic district encompassing the core of the village center of Ashburnham. It was added to the National Historic Register in 1999. The area is a well-preserved industrial village that experienced its most significant period of growth in the mid-19th century. Like many New England towns, the town center served as the hub of activity. In the Early Industrial Period after the eighteenth-century meetinghouse was abandoned, the Central District grew significantly not only as a manufacturing and commercial area, but also as a civic focus. Development of the Center as a manufacturing village accelerated after 1840. Industrial growth remained centered along Phillips Brook. A residential, commercial, and civic corridor expanded along Main Street where side-street, residential clusters emerged. There are 215 documented historic cultural resources contributing to the Ashburnham Center Historic District.

The **Cambridge Grant Historic District (ASB.P)** is a 322-acre historic district located on Russell Hill Road and Wilker Road in Ashburnham. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. The 1,000-acre area was given to the town as payment for the town’s responsibility in maintaining the first bridge across the Charles River connecting Boston to the towns in the north. There are 18 documented historical resources contributing to the district.



In July 2005, the **Underground Railroad in Massachusetts (ASB.Q.)** was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The Enoch Whitmore House is an historic house at 12 Daniels Lane in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. Built about 1818, this Federal period house is historically significant as a documented stop on the Underground Railroad, where fugitive slaves were sheltered. There are 4 documented resources contributing to this area.

Massachusetts Historical Commission – MACRIS

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has developed an Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets. The inventory identifies significant historic resources throughout the Commonwealth. In order to be included in the inventory, a property must be documented on an MHC inventory form, which is then entered into the MHC database, MACRIS.



MACRIS lists historical assets in five categories: Buildings, Areas, Structure, Object, and Burial Ground. Ashburnham's MACRIS inventory documents **379** Buildings, **17** Areas (including the Ashburnham Center Historic District) **11** Structures (i.e., ponds, bridges, commons, etc.), **8** objects, and **5** Burial Grounds totaling **420** historical resources that are recorded. A sample of the resources

documented are:

Building: US Post Office - Ashburnham Branch (ASB.115)

Area: Puffer Streetscape (ASB.H)

Structures: Ashburnham Town Pound (ASB.905)

Objects: Schoolboy Statue (ASB.903)

Burial Grounds: Ashburnham Old Cemetery (ASB.802)

Much like the National Register, listing on the State register does not impose any restrictions on an owner regarding alterations or use, provided that no federal or state license, permit, or funding is involved. The MACRIS database is available online at <http://mhc-macris.net/> The full printout of each category (as of October 25, 2023) can be found in Attachment 1 and a map of Ashburnham's Historic Districts can be found as Attachment 2 of this element.



6.4 Culture

As outlined, the buildings in Ashburnham are impressive architecturally and have significant history behind them. Many can be easily utilized for visual and performing arts centers, galleries and community gathering places. The following not only lists some of the most prominent examples but includes organizations and civic groups that work towards keeping Ashburnham's culture alive.

Performing Arts & Venues

The original **Stevens Memorial Library** (ASB.17) at 32 Main St. was built in 1890 and boasted one of the only public buildings of the Queen Anne architectural style of that time period. The building continued as the town library until 1988, when the library was moved to the newly renovated **Dolly Whitney Adams Schoolhouse** (ASB.64). The library serves as a welcoming community center that enriches the well-being of the community. The library serves as a community leader that illuminates a path for everyone to explore. As the Library's website states, "Great things happen at SML. Education. Culture. Recreation & events. Join Us!"





The **1791 Meeting House** (ASB.60) located at 79 Main St. has been restored by the Ashburnham Historical Society and serves as an important piece of the historic downtown. First built on Meetinghouse Hill, the structure was moved to Main St. and reconstructed in 1838 and served as the Town Hall until 1905. The 1791 meeting house now serves as the Ashburnham Historical Museum.

The Town has the benefit of the **Fredrick Historical Piano Collection Study Center** (ASB.17) Housed in the former Stevens Memorial Library. The Center's mission is to educate through interaction. The Fredrick Collection of Period Grand Pianos has over 20 original pianos from about 1790 to 1928, all in playing condition. The Study Center offers lecture-recitals, workshops, seminars, and numerous other events.



Winchester Park & Bandstand (ASB.916) Winchester Park is comprised of land that was part of the Winchester Estate, sold to the Town of Ashburnham in 1903 by Melvin Ohio Adams to be used as a site for a planned, new town hall. The Bandstand area serves as a community gathering spot and hosts numerous concerts throughout the year.

Visual Arts & Creative Education

Oakmont Regional High School Visual Arts Department: The department offers many opportunities for students to create works in many different mediums. Recently, the Massachusetts Cultural Council visited Oakmont art classrooms where students were able to showcase their works. The stop at the Oakmont Visual Arts classrooms was part of a visit to Ashburnham by the MA Cultural Council in an effort to help Ashburnham become a “cultural district.”

New Dawn Art Center, Inc.: The mission of New Dawn Arts Center, Inc., is to strive to enliven and unite the community around the arts through programming that makes arts education, appreciation, practice, and presentation accessible and available to the greater region. The center is housed in an 1834 church and has space used by the congregation and other local community groups and businesses related to the arts. The center includes a small store on the first floor that sells local goods.

Creative Connections Gift Shop & Gallery: Located at 56 Main St, the gift shop and gallery is located in downtown Ashburnham. The gallery represents an eclectic mix of emerging and mid-career contemporary artists working in a wide range of styles and mediums. The gift shop is a destination space featuring artisan pottery, blown glass, hand-made jewelry, wearable art and more.⁸

Cushing Academy: Cushing Academy is recognized as a unique educational setting whose faculty, staff, and facilities nurture the optimal growth of students with a range of talents, abilities, and interests. The community-oriented environment is supportive and diverse, promoting and valuing intellectual challenges and emphasizing the arts, athletics, and cultural competence.⁹

6.5 Ashburnham Historic & Cultural Policy Makers & Advocates

Ashburnham has a local **Cultural Council** that is made up of volunteers who are appointed by the Select Board for a term of three years. The purpose of the Cultural Council is to support public projects that promote access, education, diversity and excellence in the arts, humanities, and interpretive sciences in the community. The Council re-grants state funds to individuals and organizations in Town seeking to pursue or offer cultural endeavors.

The Town also has a **Historical Commission**. The Historical Commission consists of a 5-member volunteer board appointed by the Select Board for a term of 3 years. The Historical Commission’s mission is to preserve, promote, and develop an inventory for the identification and protection of historic properties in Town that includes areas, buildings, monuments, sites, burial grounds, and structures. The Commission is also charged with determining a building’s significance under the **Demolition Delay Bylaw** that was adopted in 1990.

The intent of the Town’s **Historical Society** is to engage in historical study relating to the town of Ashburnham and its individuals and families identified with its early history. Their

⁸ <https://www.ccgiftgallery.com/about-us/> accessed October 27, 2023

⁹ <https://www.cushing.org/about-us/mission-and-values> accessed October 27, 2023

efforts include collecting, holding, preserving, and exhibiting letters, books, papers, relics, and other objects that may be of historical value and interest to the people and friends of Ashburnham. The Historical Society owns the 1791 Meeting House Museum and with its many volunteers, is instrumental in keeping the history of Ashburnham in the forefront of all community events.

Another cultural asset of the community is the **Celebrate Ashburnham Committee**. The primary mission of this committee is to promote local business awareness, begin to build capacity to help grow the Ashburnham economy, in particular, the creative economy (profit and non-profit) leveraging Ashburnham's creative assets in a more productive fashion, including the educational institutions. The committee works closely with local businesses, Ashburnham Cultural Council, the regional school district, Cushing Academy, New Dawn Arts Center, Economic Development Commission, other Ashburnham boards, committees, and commissions as well as local service organizations. The highly successful **Celebrate Ashburnham Street Fair** is one of the most popular events in the town and the most visible result of their work.

The **Ashburnham Agricultural Commission** serves as facilitators for encouraging the pursuit of agriculture in Ashburnham; promotes agricultural-based economic opportunities; act as mediators, advocates, educators, and/or negotiators on farming and forestry issues; works towards preservation of prime agricultural and forestry lands; and pursues all initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agricultural community.

Ashburnham/Westminster Community Media is a public access television station that provides Community Outreach and communication services for both Ashburnham & Westminster. It should also be noted that the Town of Ashburnham has frequent **special events** throughout the year to help promote local businesses, organizations, and the community.

Today, Ashburnham's Cultural & Historical Resources include a representation of its pre-historic natural environment, ancient native culture and artifacts, historical colonial settlement, agricultural and industrial heritage, academic legacy, diversity and wealth of natural resources, scenic beauty, civic pride, community devotion, and respect and appreciation for art, music, and science. Together, these things represent Ashburnham's cultural identity and heritage.



Identified Cultural Assets in the Montachusett Region

The Montachusett Region comprises 30-plus towns and cities with three mountains: Monadnock, Watatic, and Wachusett. Combine them and you get *Montachusett*, a scenic and fun-filled region of North Central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire.

Listed by town are some of the cultural resources in the region. Please refer to each town's website for additional information.

Town of Ashby

- Ashby Cultural Council
- Ashby Free Public Library
- Ashby Historical Society
- Ashby Musical Festival

Town of Athol

- Athol Cultural Council
- Athol Historical Society, Inc.
- Athol Public Library
- Athol-Orange Community Television (AOTV)

Town of Ayer

- Ayer Cultural Council
- Ayer Historical Commission
- Devens Historical Museum (Devens)
- Freedom's Way Heritage Association – Cultural Heritage Institute,

Town of Clinton

- Bigelow Free Public Library
- Clinton Community Theatre
- Clinton Cultural Council
- Clinton Historical Society

City of Fitchburg

- Fitchburg Art Museum
- Wallace Civic Center
- Dukakis Performing Arts Center (Monty Tech)
- Fitchburg State University Center Stage Performing Arts

City of Gardner

- Theater at the MOUNT (Mount Wachusett Community College – MWCC)
- Gardner Area League of Artists (GALA)
- Gardner Cultural Council
- Gardner Museum, Incorporated

Town of Groton

- Groton Hill Music Center
- Groton School
- The Dillon Art Center
- Christopher Carey Brodigan Gallery

Town of Harvard

- Arts Management Consulting Company
- First Harvard Unitarian Church – Concerts at Common
- For Arts Sake Community Art Association

- Friends of the Harvard Public Library

Town of Hubbardston

- Finnish Heritage Society – Sovittaja
- Hubbardston Community Theater
- Hubbardston Cultural Council

Town of Lancaster

- American Guild of Organists
- Atlantic Wind Symphony
- Dexter Drumlin Winterfest Committee
- Friends of the Lancaster Town Library

City of Leominster

- Barbershop Harmony Society (Leominster)
- Central Massachusetts Repertory Theater
- CST Productions
- Leominster Public Library

Town of Lunenburg

- American Humanists Association
- Central Mass. Women’s Caucus for Art
- Guild Dancers, Inc.
- Joint Venture Orchestra

Town of Petersham

- Harvard Forest Archive
- Petersham Craft Center
- Petersham Cultural Council
- Petersham Historical Society, Incorporated

Town of Phillipston

- Phillipston Free Public Library (+ Friends of Phillipston Library)
- Historical Society of Phillipston, Inc.
- Phillipston Cultural Council
- Phillipston Historical Commission

Town of Royalston

- Phineas S. Newton Library
- Royalston Arts Foundry
- Royalston Cultural Council
- Village Improvement and Historical Society of Royalston, Inc.

Town of Shirley

- Shirley Cultural Council
- Shirley Meetinghouse
- Hazen Memorial Library
- Shirley Historical Society and Museum

Town of Sterling

- Sterling Community Theatre
- Sterling Cultural Council
- Sterling Historical Society, Inc.
- Sterling Meetinghouse News

Town of Templeton

- Boynton Public Library
- Narragansett Community Band
- Narragansett Regional High School Performing Arts
- Templeton Cultural Council

Town of Townsend

- Amanda E. Dwight Entertainment Fund
- Squannacook PTO Cultural Arts
- Townsend Cultural Council
- Townsend Public Library

Town of Westminster

- Forbush Memorial Library
- Westminster Arts Association, Inc.
- Westminster Cultural Council
- Westminster Historical Society

Town of Winchendon

- Beals Memorial Library
- Clark Memorial Community Center
- Winchendon Cultural Council
- Winchendon Historical Society

6.6 Massachusetts State Historic & Cultural Programs

Massachusetts Cultural Council: Mass Cultural Council works to elevate rich cultural life in Massachusetts. The Council serves the Commonwealth and all who live, work, visit, and play here by amplifying creativity, providing resources, expanding relationships, and championing transformational changes that maintain and grow a thriving creative and cultural ecosystem. More information can be found at:

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/>

Massachusetts Historical Commission's Programs & Services

Preservation Planning

Since its inception in 1963, MHC has worked closely with local preservation groups. Many of the communities in the Commonwealth now benefit from preservation programs. The Preservation Planning staff is responsible for assisting and encouraging local groups to become strong advocates for historic preservation planning. Some of the measures include:

Survey: As previously described, this is the first step in a community's preservation planning process is to identify, describe and locate buildings, structures, objects, areas, burial grounds, landscape features, and sites that are of historical, architectural, or archaeological importance to the community, the state, or the nation. A comprehensive inventory of a town's historical assets serves as the basis for all future preservation activities. This inventory becomes part of a statewide inventory and enables MHC staff and local preservationists

make consistent and informed preservation decisions. MHC maintains a statewide survey at the reconnaissance level to formulate a broad context for evaluating the significance of historic and prehistoric properties.

Establishing Local Historic Districts: A Local Historic District (LHD) is established and administered by a community to protect the distinctive characteristics of important areas, and to encourage new structural designs that are compatible with the area's historic setting. Once an LHD is established, a Local Historic District Commission (LHDC) is appointed to review all applications for exterior changes to properties within the district. This design review process assures that changes to properties will not detract from the district's historic character. Review criteria are determined by each city and town and vary for each local district.

Certified Local Government Program: The Certified Local Government Program* (CLG) is a unique partnership that provides a close integration of federal, state, and local preservation activities. Communities that have enacted historic preservation legislation are eligible to apply to MHC for certification. By extending state and federal programs at the local level, the CLG program allows communities to participate directly in the review and approval of National Register nominations. CLGs are eligible to compete for at least 10 percent of the federal funds allocated to MHC.

Technical Services

The Technical Services Division staff provide a wide range of technical preservation assistance to public agencies, communities, and the public. Those programs include:

Historic Preservation Certification The federal tax incentive program* has encouraged private investment and rehabilitation of historic properties and has been particularly valuable to Massachusetts. This program allows owners of National Register buildings in commercial, industrial, or rental residential uses to qualify for a 20 percent Investment Tax Credit, in effect a 20 percent rebate, based on rehabilitation costs.

Environmental Review and Public Planning. As the State Historic Preservation Office, the MHC acts as liaison to federal, state, and local development agencies such as the Federal Highway Administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Massachusetts Industrial Finance Agency. The MHC is authorized by state and federal law* to review and comment on certain state and federally licensed, permitted, or funded projects to determine whether the proposed project will have an impact on historic or prehistoric properties.

Grants

Economic incentives for historic preservation and rehabilitation serve to stimulate research and preserve our historic properties. The MHC administers a federal grants-in-aid program for survey and planning projects as well as a state matching grant program for restoration, rehabilitation, and research of properties listed in the State Register. When funds are

available, reimbursement grants are awarded annually through a competitive application process.

Virtual Workshops for Local Communities

MHC's Local Government Programs Coordinator hosts a regular series of virtual workshops on topics important to local Historical and Historic District Commission members and municipal staff. New workshops are posted every three to four months.

A complete list of resources and information can be found at:

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcprograms.htm>

6.7 Conclusion

Cultural identity is shaped by situation, salutation, sustenance, and salvation, by historical events and their circumstances, developments, and outcomes.

Traditional cultural identity is often passed down as folklore, or fire-side stories of the trials, tribulations, successes, failures, losses and victories of a town, its people, or an early settler or founding father. The legends often include descriptions of instances of seemingly unsurmountable challenges related to a vast wilderness, wild beast, overwhelming or seemingly impossible task, or some malicious, violent, or evil act or injustice brought upon a person or the community. Such challenges were often overcome through steadfast determination and a refusal to succumb. The protagonist is, in many cases, someone of a seemingly larger-than-life persona, accomplishing some unbelievable task or achievement, or, possessing such highly esteemed leadership qualities to rally a group of followers capable of accomplishing the task-at-hand and overcoming or defeating the challenge.

While these early stories often seem like more of myth than factual recollection, the real, unimaginable levels of hardship faced by the early settlers of New England were immense, even unimaginable, and must be taken into account when considering the validity of any local lore of early stories or legends. It has been said that the clearing of New England's forests by the first settlers of this land is one of the single greatest feats ever accomplished by humankind. New England's thousands of linear miles of stone walls provide both evidence of this great feat and of the condition of the land that was cleared – full of large granite rocks. In many places it must have seemed that there were more rocks than soil. To build a 20-foot length of 4-foot stone wall of New England field granite for a day seems like a difficult and daunting task. To build miles of such walls for the better part of a lifetime seems unfathomable, but it was done.

Most often the purpose of the deeds accomplished by the heroes of our local folklore were undertaken not only for individual or personal survival and success, but for the greater good and prosperity of the town and its present and future people. The anecdotal details of the tales and traditions change or evolve over time, but the moral often remains the same, hard work for the greater good, in the name of the town, and the legacy of its people, is worthy of the cause and toils. Personal character, an individual form of identity, often plays a large role in the development of a town's communal cultural identity. The unique character, and exceptional traits or qualities of individuals responsible for or involved in the formation of a town (or actively present during its many of its' defining moments or activities), its forefathers, contribute greatly to the town's cultural identity. Such character traits often included determination, selflessness, hard-work, refusal to quit, bravery, acts of heroism during hazardous situations, a belief in fairness and equality, marksmanship, craftsmanship, optimism, and humbleness.

6.8 Vision, Goals & Actions

It is important to know and understand the history, heritage, and culture of a town, its common pride. Without knowledge and understanding, you cannot have appreciation and without a common sense of appreciation it is near impossible, and perhaps meaningless to promote and protect that history, heritage, and culture. Protection of a Town's history, heritage, and culture, protects and solidifies its identity and gives its people a sense of hometown pride. By honoring the legacies of those who came before, it enables, and perhaps even ensures future community success and prosperity. Our cultural identity is shaped in the past but is continually defined and re-defined over time, and therefore, formed for the future. What we know and do today is based on what we have learned from those who came before us, but our wisdom and our actions matter most not to us or them, but to those who will come after us, in future generations.

Vision

Ashburnham will recognize and value its historical and cultural resources, preserving and celebrating these assets in a manner that enhances residents' and visitors' quality of life, promotes a sense of connection to the community, and furthers its economic development goals.

Goals

Goal HCR1: Continue to protect, promote, preserve, and reasonably and responsibly repair, rehabilitate, and enhance historical and cultural resources from all periods of human and natural history.

Action 1.1: Identify Native American (precolonial) trails/paths, canoe portages, and sites for preservation and education purposes.

Action 1.2: Coordinate with local Tribal groups and Native American Cultural Heritage and Educational organizations to better tell the story and preserve the cultural heritage of Native people who inhabited and lived sustainably upon the land and waters of the region, including Ashburnham.

Action 1.3: Continue to understand and document the role of Ashburnham's residents and community in the Abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad system.

Action 1.4: Periodically confirm that all historically significant assets are inventoried.

Action 1.5: Continue to support the Ashburnham Historical Commission and Cultural Council and maintain cooperative relationships and coordinate with the Ashburnham Historical Society, Massachusetts Historical Commission, and Massachusetts Historical Society and other important historical and cultural organizations to protect and promote Ashburnham's Historical & Cultural Resources.

Goal HCR2: Create a more clearly defined picture of the Town's historical & cultural resources, and better educate the community about those assets.

Action 2.1: Update the brochure that highlights the town's historic and cultural Assets and events.

Action 2.2: Create "self guided" tour materials of historically significant sites within

Town.

Goal HCR3: Ashburnham will utilize its historic and cultural resources to promote the cultural and creative economy, and to complement its efforts to promote economic development opportunities focused on arts, education, and outdoor recreation.

Action 3.1: Enhance the capacity of the Town and its public, non-profit, and private institutions help grow the Creative Economy around the arts and sciences including music, art, science, technology, engineering, and math.

Action 3.2: Leverage the creative assets in a more productive fashion, especially those of educational institutions.

Action 3.3: Build greater linkages between the Town and Region's Historic & Creative Assets to promote Ashburnham's regional role & importance.

Action 3.4: Continue to support and build upon the missions of the Ashburnham Historical Commission and Cultural Council to facilitate traditional and enhanced historical and cultural opportunities and experiences.

Action 3.5: Enhance the capacity of the Town and its public, non-profit, and private institutions to develop and maintain an economy focused on Outdoor Recreation and Eco-Tourism utilizing existing green infrastructure and unique landscape features and amenities, such as Mount Watitic, the Midstate Trail.

Action 3.6: Continue to explore, understand, and emphasize the connections between Historical, Cultural, and Natural Resources in Ashburnham and demonstrate their intrinsic values and the immense social and economic benefits they can provide for the community.