

# Statement of Significance

The Bolton Center Historic District is a well-preserved, semi-rural linear town center, consisting of residential, institutional, and commercial resources dating primarily from the late-eighteenth through early twentieth centuries. This 73-acre area gradually developed as the main focus of Bolton's civic and professional life after the first meetinghouse was built just to the south in 1740, and over the years saw the construction of a series of schools, three more churches, two town halls, a public library, and several commercial and manufacturing enterprises.

Situated at a crossroads on the Lancaster Road, the major eighteenth-century east/west transportation route through the northeast part of Worcester County, the area thrived as a major stagecoach and mail stop in the years between the Revolution and the coming of the railroads. A significant lodging and traveling trade developed in several early inns and taverns, stores, and other transportation-related services associated, including blacksmith and harness shops. Handsome high-style and vernacular residences belonging to the ministers, inn- and storekeepers, entrepreneurs and artisans, and, of course, farmers, grew up here over the course of the town's first century, and Bolton remained an area of mixed functions into the twentieth century.

Over two-thirds of the thirty buildings in the district in 1831 are still standing. A dozen more houses were built before 1875; two more are residences of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and only seven infill houses date to the first third of the twentieth century.

Intrusions in the area are minimal, (consisting of only four modern houses and business buildings, plus several minor outbuildings), and alterations are generally confined to additions and door, window, and siding changes on a few of the older structures. The result is a district that retains the character and integrity it had acquired by the early twentieth century, and meets Criteria A and C of the National Register at the local level.

## **Residential and Economic Development**

Bolton was set off from Lancaster, the largest and earliest community in central Massachusetts, as a separate town in 1738. Although its original thirty-five square miles were reduced over time by the formation of the district of Berlin in 1784, its meetinghouse center still occupies the geographical center of the town. (Bolton's boundaries were further altered in 1829 by the annexation of part of Marlborough, and the formation of the town of Hudson in 1868).

The first meetinghouse stood from 1740 until 1793 Just south of this district; the line of the lane that led to it can still be seen (Map #47). In contrast to the more nucleated settlements of earlier colonial communities, the first house lots in towns established in Bolton's era tended to be at least 20 acres in area, creating an open, dispersed pattern of settlement even in the town center, where farms intermingled with the meetinghouse, schoolhouse, and other non-residential buildings.

The Bolton Center district still gives evidence of this type of early development in the survival of fields and woods adjacent to the road or visible behind the houses, as well as in the presence of at least four eighteenth-century farmsteads. The farmhouses of the first and third town ministers, Thomas Goss (earliest section ca. 1741) and Phineas Wright (ca. 1785), face each other at 752 and 763 Main Street-(Map #s 59 and 60), the latter still associated with forty acres of open land.

Further east, the ca. 1793 farmhouse of Samuel Blood at 579 Main Street (Map #4) still stands on eighteen acres, and over thirty wooded and cultivated acres of the extensive holdings of the family of Gen. Stephen Gardner, who built his second house at 642 Main Street (Map #10) in 1798, remain on both sides of the road. (Many of the original lot configurations at the center, including the Blood and Gardner farms, are still evident in the very deep parcels extending far back from both sides of Main Street. The boundaries of this linear district have generally been drawn close to the road - (see district maps, and Section 10: Boundary Description and Justification.)

Over the course of the town's first several decades, however, land fronting on the road in the center section of the district was gradually divided and sold off in smaller parcels, and by the 1830s a continuous line of seven buildings, the densest cluster in Bolton, stood close to the curving south side of Main Street near the crossing of the Great Brook. Most of these buildings, which today contribute greatly to the late-Georgian and Federal character of the district, stand on land originally belonging to the Sawyer family. This short section of the street was also the focus for-much of the early commercial and cottage-industry activity at the town center.

By 1813 Joel and his brother Nathan. Sawyer were making watches and jewelry in the house at 694 Main Street (Map #30), and Samuel and Rodney Gutterson made harnesses at 714 (Map #40), possibly in a former potash shop (one of two in the vicinity) that had been moved onto the property. Then in the early 1830s, Joel Sawyer established the first of a cluster of small "mechanics' shops" when he built a barn and sawmill on the Great Brook, Just below the road. In 1820, Charles Woodbury and Abraham Holman opened the district's longest-lived commercial enterprise, a general store, in the building at 718 Main Street (Map #43), that has been called for generations the "Old Brick Store". Joseph Sawyer, Jr. operated another store next to his house (both now combined under one roof) at 702 Main Street (Map #33).

Also in the early eighteenth century, two doctors were practicing here --Dr. Levi Sawyer in an older house on the site of 708 Main Street (Map #37), and Dr. Amos Parker at 704 (Map #35). Dr. Parker, who was appointed Bolton's first postmaster in 1808 and remained in the post for 42 years, also operated the post office from his house. Nearby on the north side of the street Haven Newton had a tailor shop, which was incorporated into his son's new Greek Revival house at 683 Main Street (Map #26), in 1842. By 1839 there was enough business to support another tailor, Ebenezer Towne who built his house and tailor shop (with living space above), both pedimented, gable-end buildings, at 713 and 711 Main

Street (Map #s 38 and 39). (That combined property was later occupied in direct succession by two more doctors, Dr. Windsor Howe Bigelow, and Dr. Oliver Everett, both of whom lived at the latter and used the former as their medical office. In 1893 Dr. Everett became the Bolton postmaster, and the shop was used for the post office; later it was the town's first telephone office, as well.)

Part of the clientele for Bolton center's early-nineteenth-century merchants, artisans, and professionals, as well as employment for other Bolton residents, was generated by the presence of at least three inns and taverns within the district, all long-since demolished--the Holman Inn, located at about 737-739 Main Street, Col. Caleb Wheeler's inn on the north side of the road between #711 and 715, and the Woodbury Inn, which stood on the site of 670 Main Street.

Although there were several other inns operating in Bolton in the eighteenth century, these on the Lancaster Road, which by 1800 had become part of the Post Road from Boston to Lancaster and into New Hampshire, were in a prime location to take advantage of the increase in travel that took place after the Revolution. Several Bolton Center businessmen had even invested in the most significant road improvement of the period, the 1805 Lancaster & Bolton Turnpike, which followed the Lancaster Road beginning just west of the district.

Also contributing to the thriving local business was the fact that Silas Holman and his son, Gen. Amory Holman, who in 1818 succeeded his father as owner of the most well-known establishment, the Holman Inn, had controlling interests in some of the regional stagecoach lines. This arrangement ensured not only that stagecoaches would stop here, but that the Holmans' other enterprises, including a blacksmith shop and harness shop, would have plenty of work servicing the coaches and horses. Then, in 1827, Amory Holman founded the large Bolton & Lancaster Stage Company, with headquarters at the inn. Business again increased when, in 1832, Gen. Holman received contracts to carry the mail from Boston to Albany and to Brattleboro, Vermont. He eventually sublet twelve subsidiary lines to his coach drivers.

As the Holman Inn grew and its business expanded, it employed a sizeable staff, some of whom boarded or rented space in other buildings that the Holmans constructed. The earliest of the Holman rental houses is the Holman Annex at 746 Main Street (Map #57), believed to have been built at the beginning of the nineteenth century while Silas Holman was still owner of the inn, and possibly later raised to two stories and updated with early Greek Revival detailing. The double-house at 720 Main Street (Map #46), probably put up in the 1830s by the owners of the brick store, was apparently the prototype for two others that Amory Holman built a few years afterward at 726/728 (Map #50), and 730 Main Street (Map #52) out of material from an enormous horse shed for the inn that had stood nearby on the south side of the road. (As many as ninety horses were kept on the grounds at one time). The two-story horse shed was torn down, however, as the railroad era dawned and the business of both the stagecoach and the inn went into a sharp decline. The two new double-houses, along with another that burned down, were called the "Corporation Houses" for the joint stock company formed by Amory Holman and twenty-one investors around 1837. The business of "the corporation" was the production of boots and shoes, and the tenants of these houses were apparently shoe-workers and their families.

The Bolton Shoe Company, although it was never a large company, and was relatively short-lived, (by 1858 it had succumbed to regional competition and the absence of any nearby railroad), was Bolton center's main industrial enterprise of the mid-nineteenth century. Most of its stockholders were local Bolton men, including Amory Holman, Sherman Houghton, and brick-store-owner George Rice. Earlier attempts at Bolton center to manufacture goods for more than a local market had included a sizable turn--of the-nineteenth-century hat shop run by Capt. Samuel Blood (579 Main Street) and his son, Edmund, at the east end of the district, a tannery operated by Simeon Cunningham (777 Main Street) and others just north of the intersection of Harvard Road from ca. 1806 through the 1850's, and significant home --production for the regional industry of tortoise-shell comb-making. The industrial production of those enterprises was relatively minor, however, and the lack of substantial water power had prevented other major industrial development in town. By contrast, the shoe company, formed at the end of the 1830s, was poised to take advantage of the advances in technology and production methods of the industrial revolution. The Bolton Shoe Company factory building still stands at 664 Main Street (Map #19).

In addition, Amory Holman also built a three-story, 60-by-18-foot shoe-shop of his own, which stood behind 726/728 Great Road, and, like the "corporation houses," was constructed out of material from the Holman Inn horse shed. In 1837, the value of Bolton's shoe production in an aggregation of small shops amounted to \$6,000; by 1856, due largely to the output of the Bolton Shoe Company, it had grown to over \$48,000. No railroad was ever built through the center of Bolton, however, and, just as the initial building of a railroad through Fitchburg led to the demise of the inn and stagecoach business, competition from larger mid-century regional mills that had the benefit of railroad access put an early end to Bolton's shoe industry.

With the advent of the Civil War and the decline of the shoe company, development at the center, as elsewhere in town, came nearly to a standstill. The population had increased from 1255 in 1855 to 1802 in 1865, then dropped by nearly 500 by 1870, due largely to the loss of part of the town to Hudson in 1868. Only one house was constructed in the center district between 1855 and 1870, the vernacular Italianate gable-end cottage of the town's first dentist, Dr. Warren Houghton built about 1869 at 662 Main Street (Map #18), on part of the former Bolton Shoe Co. property that had been acquired by his father-in-law, Sherman Houghton of 674 Main Street. In 1870-71, another of Sherman Houghton's sons-in-law, carpenter William W. Robinson built a similar gable-end cottage for resale at 725 Main Street (Map #49), moving and converting one of the relocated shoe shops to a store and dwelling (later burned) just to its east. In 1874 the Holman Inn itself was torn down, and Civil-War veteran Charles Rich moved its ballroom wing east to become the house at 676 Main Street (Map #24). The Holman Inn harness shop was also converted to a dwelling (727 Main Street; Map #51). In 1880, a vernacular Italianate 2 1/2-story gable-end house, 733 Main Street, was built on the site of the inn.

No other residence was built in the center until the 1890's, when in about 1898 a transitional Italianate/Queen Anne house was constructed at 651 Main Street (Map #12). By the 1890s, several of Bolton's large agricultural properties had become true "gentleman's farms." Some had made the transition in mid-century from mixed husbandry to dairy farming; others

had shifted from growing apples for cider production to large orchards for apples and peaches for "winter fruit" (eating). Both trends were in evidence at the old Blood Farm at 579 Main Street, which, under the name of Orchard View Farm, was operated through the turn of the century by a series of owners as an apple-orchard, vegetable, and dairy farm. In 1915 the farm was purchased by Howard Atwood, a Boston wool merchant, who raised horses and pedigreed cattle, and added to the vast array of connected barns on the hill. True to the large "gentleman's farm" concept, he also had three modest houses built across the street from the farmstead for his farm manager and other employees (#s 550, 556, and 562 Main Street; Map #s 1, 2, 3). (Just as the "corporation houses" had been built of material from the Holman Inn horse shed, the lumber for these three Colonial Revival houses came from a three-story carriage-painting shop, on Hudson Road).

Other farms at Bolton Center, some of which were established by later generations of a family on land divided out from an earlier, larger farm, also continued in agricultural use through the early part of this century; a few are still farmed today. At the west end of the district, three generations of the family of Rev. Richard Edes Bolton's fifth minister, continued to operate the farm at 76 Main Street (Map #60), and Harvard Road until 1950, and four generations of the Carreter/Powers family farmed the large acreage at #649 Main Street that Stephen Gardner had divided out of his own land for his son, Theodore in 1831 (Map #11).

Over the years, several farmers sold off small house lots along the street, which became the homes of people in other professions. Among them were several single and widowed women. By the 1830's Nancy Townsend, a-mantua-maker, owned the little 1790s cottage built by hatter John Hyde on part of the Blood Farm at 601 Main Street (Map 95), and from 1909 to 1933 ), Helen Brigham owned the little house put up by Stephen Gardner in 1831 at 607 Main Street (Map #6). In 1851, widow Eunice Burgess bought a small lot that had been part of David Carpenter's farm at 649, and apparently had the gable- end Greek Revival cottage at 631 Main Street (Map #9) constructed that same year. Further west, another, extremely well-preserved Greek Revival gable-end cottage at 749 Main Street (Map #58) was built for Miss Elizabeth Osborne in about 1849; it was later the home of Mrs. Achsah Sawyer and her daughter Lucy; the latter owned it until her death in 1937.

Along with the Atwood farm employees' houses of 1918-19, the last significant early-modern development at Bolton Center was the construction of four other vernacular houses - carpenter Thomas Wetherbee's late Queen Anne-style residence of 1912 at 670 Main Street (Map #20), on the site of the old Woodbury Tavern; the 1916 craftsman bungalow of Edwin Pardee at 608 Main Street (Map #7), which stands on the foundation of an earlier house; another Craftsman cottage/bungalow of ca. 1932 built by John Smith around his former grocery store at 703 Main (Map #34); and the largest of the group, garage-owner Harry Sutton's two-story gable-end house of ca. 1918 at 723 Main Street (Map #48). (The latter house stands next to the district's most significant early-twentieth-century transportation-related building, Harry Sutton's ca. 1920 Bolton Garage at 719 Main Street (Map #45), expanded by John Smith after 1927). The latest house in the district, built in 1942, is the residence of John Powers an historical gambrel-roofed "Cape Cod Cottage" at 615 Main Street (Map #64).

### **Institutional Development**

Once the town of Bolton was established in 1738, its citizens embarked on a continuing process that involved the spiritual, intellectual, and social lives of the townspeople. The construction of the meetinghouse in 1740 was the first major step. In 1793 the meetinghouse was replaced by a larger structure at what was determined to be the new geographical center of town, a quarter-mile northeast of the original center, at today's 673 Main Street. (To clear the site, the Houghton House then belonging to William Woodbury, was apparently relocated to 674 Main, on the south side of the road). The second meetinghouse, surrounded by a small public common, stood for over 130 years. It burned down in 1926, and was replaced in 1928 by the present Colonial Revival clapboard church. Today, this church, the Federated Church of Bolton/First Parish of Bolton (Map 921), is a rare example of a consolidation of the various religious trends that developed over time in so many New England communities. Truly interdenominational, in 1931 it united the church of Bolton's First Parish (Unitarian; the descendant of the original town church), the Baptist Church (established 1832), and the Monthly Meeting of Friends, (Quakers, who had formed a society in South Bolton in the eighteenth century). In 1947 the church charter was further expanded to accommodate local Methodist, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian groups, and the United Church of Christ. Although the earliest public structures built at Bolton center are gone, as is evidenced by the Federated Church, their later successors provide a vivid illustration of the evolution of the town, its needs, beliefs, and concerns. One singular development took place in 1812, when, as a result of a new law of the Commonwealth, the town built a brick powderhouse high on the hill northeast of the second meetinghouse (Map #15). Its function was to store the ammunition that had hitherto been kept first under the pulpit, then in the garret, of the meetinghouse itself. (Early in this century, gifts of land around the powderhouse from the Newton family created a continuous park down the hillside to the former meetinghouse common).

Bolton's first schoolhouse had been built near the original meetinghouse at the corner of today's Wataquadoc and Manor Roads in 1744. In the early 1790s, as part of a townwide school-building program, a new center school was apparently constructed near the new meetinghouse location. Although both these schoolhouses have disappeared, two of their nineteenth-century successors remain. 689 Main Street (Map #27), a typical one-story gable-end building, is the second Center District Schoolhouse, built in 1825 on the site of the very first town school at the intersection of Wataquadoc and Manor Roads. It was moved to Main Street in about 1865 and converted by George and Henry Newton (later owners of the brick store), to a small general store; some years afterward it was moved back on the property, and converted to a house in about 1925. The replacement for this school is also still standing, at 9 Wataquadoc Road (Map #42). Built in 1841, that slightly larger gable-end building, with Greek Revival detail, began as the first Baptist Meetinghouse. Baptists had been gathering in Bolton since 1828, and when their numbers grew large enough to construct a bigger church on Main Street in 1866 (destroyed in 1938), the town purchased their first "neat, cozy house of prayer" to be the new District #1 (Center) School (Whitcomb, 133). (After a few years in the late 1890s, during which the building was used as an intermediate school, all the lower grades in Bolton were consolidated in old schoolhouses relocated to land south of the millpond, and this building was discontinued for school use. It then took on a new life for the storage of town vehicles--first for the town hearse, and later for the center fire engine.) Bolton's first high school is also still standing in the district, at 697 Main Street (Map #31). Called the Houghton School in honor of the property's donor, Joseph Houghton, this building, an even

larger, two-story version of Greek Revival gable-end schoolhouse design, was constructed by the town in 1849. Today it functions as the Bolton Police Station. Only the most recent school building at the center deserves its original function. The Emerson School, which stands at 50 Mechanic Street (Map#29), was built in 1923 as the town's first modern elementary school. Like the Houghton School, this brick, Colonial Revival school was also the result of a significant donation, from Edward D. Emerson, in memory of his wife and daughter.

The present Bolton Town House at 663 Main Street (Map #16), was built in 1853, replacing an 1834 town hall on the same site that had burned down. As was typical of a town hall in a small community, the building was used for all manner of gatherings in addition to town meetings--balls, lectures, concerts, and a place for the local "singing school". In 1878, the local Farmers' and Mechanics' Association even erected a dining hall behind the building (since demolished.) In spite of the presence of this public space in the center of town, with the proliferation of local organizations and societies in the middle of the nineteenth century, there was still a need for an additional meeting hall. In the mid-1860's, carpenter William Robinson met the challenge, when he converted the former Bolton Shoe Company factory, directly across the street from the Town House at 664 Main Street (Map #19), for a second meeting space. Called "Robinson Hall", this building served two generations as the regular gathering place for temperance meetings (Mr. Robinson was the first president of the Bolton Centennial Temperance Union), the Bolton Grange, and for church suppers, and over the years many performances were given on its small stage. (The building was remodeled to a duplex by another carpenter, Thomas Wetherbee, about 1913).

One early renovation to the Town House was the creation of a room on the first floor (now the Selectmen's room) for the Bolton Public Library which was established in 1859. Its initial collection incorporated books from four of the school districts and from several local organizations, including an early Historical Association. In 1903 the library acquired its own building, when the daughters of Capt. Joseph Whitney donated the little English Revival building at 738 Main Street (Map #54), in his memory.

As mentioned above, twentieth-century change to the Bolton Center Historic District has been minimal since the 1930's. The properties have been well-maintained, and the area thus retains the character of a linear institutional/commercial/residential town center that evolved over nearly two centuries from the time the first meetinghouse was built in 1740. Development pressures in rural towns close to Route 495 have been tremendous in the past decade, however. Several of the larger properties in the district are either owned by developers or may be in the near future, and there is concern for two buildings that presently stand vacant. Nomination of the Center Village to the National Register will strengthen the town's many current preservation efforts, and raise the level of public awareness and pride that is crucially needed at this time.

### **Archeological Significance**

Since patterns of prehistoric settlement and subsistence in Bolton are poorly understood, any surviving sites could be significant. Prehistoric sites in this area can contribute important information on the local and regional importance of Native American settlement in the Nashua River drainage and its relationship to more recognized Native settlement loci in the Assabet and Sudbury drainages to the east and south. This information can be used to further understand the regional importance of Native American settlement in the overall Merrimack River system. Prehistoric sites in the district locale can also help to establish the nature of Native settlement in upland areas beyond the floodplains of major area drainages stated above. Interior upland areas are underreported in the Bolton locale, indicating an important part of the Native American subsistence and settlement system may be missing in our current database. Prehistoric sites in this area can help more fully define the local and regional subsistence and settlement models by contributing examples of site variability and resource use within the district area. Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential to provide several types of information relating to the social, cultural and economic characteristics which were responsible for the successful development of a semi-rural linear town center during the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries. While over two-thirds of the districts buildings present in 1831 are still extant, archaeological resources can contribute examples of the remaining one-third of the buildings, many of which probably date to the 18th century including residential, institutional and industrial types. Structural remains can help reconstruct the 18th century linear village pattern and the changes it went through as it developed from its agricultural beginnings to include manufacturing and transportation importance related to stage travel in the 19th century. Structural remains from residences and related outbuildings can help establish land use patterns within larger than normal 20 acre home sites characteristic of the early linear settlement. Structural survivals can also contribute examples of commercial buildings important but no longer extant in the district. In particular, survivals of inns or taverns can be especially important since they played an important role in the district's growth as part of a regional transportation network prior to the start of the railroad. Archaeological survivals of the district's shoe shops, hat shops, harness shops, watch and jewelry manufacturers and stores can also contribute to the district's significance by providing examples of commercial enterprises responsible for the districts economic and cultural growth. As many of these ventures grew, they contributed to the growth and importance of transportation networks and less reliance on agriculture. Business growth in the district was also responsible for population growth, resulting in rental housing, company owned housing, and ethnic/social diversity. The study of structural survivals combined with the detailed analysis of occupational related features can contribute valuable information in each of the topical areas. Archaeological survivals can also contribute valuable information relating to the birth and growth of industry in the district and the role it played in the local economy. Documentary research combined with archaeological testing can identify the full range of industrial activities which occurred in the Pond Park/Sawyer Mill Complex area throughout the 19th century. Similar research can also identify the levels of technology employed at the mill(s) and how it compared to similar activities on a regional/national level. Archaeological research can identify the range of goods/products produced at the mill(s) and the extent to which they were consumed locally or traded within regional markets. Archaeological research in the Pond Park area can also contribute information relating to the technologies and construction techniques related to water power systems used at the mill(s) and how they may have changed through time. Evidence may be present relating to the change over from water power to power generating.

Archaeological studies can also help reconstruct the locations and form for many of the institutional buildings which helped develop the district as a village center. Structural survivals of buildings no longer extant and extant buildings combined with analysis of outbuildings and occupational related features can contribute information to the growth of public education

in the district, town government and religion. The analysis of occupational related features can also contribute information relating to the lives of village inhabitants at the family or residence level. This information can be used to study social stratification in the district/village and the specific ways in which it occurred. Occupational related features can also contribute information on the extent to which manufacturing occurred at the residential level and its importance to the overall village and family economy.