



## CHAPTER 4

# HISTORIC PRESERVATION ELEMENT

What makes Princeton special? What are the tangible resources that give Princeton its sense of place? These questions are irrevocably linked to Princeton's natural and built environments, which provide a visual link to the town's rural heritage. From its historic residences to the barns and stone walls of rural farmsteads, Princeton is fortunate to retain significant vestiges of its history. The town's cultural identity is enhanced by its arts community, local repositories of historic artifacts and active community groups, all of which contribute to the unique atmosphere of this rural town.

Recognizing the role of cultural resources in defining a community's sense of place is vital in any effort to maintain rural character. In a town as rich in cultural resources as Princeton, it is critical to inventory and document them in order to provide a framework for preservation. A master plan is not meant to serve as a comprehensive preservation plan for the community, however. Instead, it is a planning tool to begin a conversation about Princeton's resources and their role in defining the town's unique sense of place and rural heritage. The historic preservation element should review the town's previous efforts to address cultural resource protection and identify the significant role that Princeton's local organizations and residents have played in preserving historic buildings, landscapes and sites.

## BRIEF HISTORY OF PRINCETON

Princeton's documented history spans more than four centuries. During the Native American period, the area that now comprises Princeton was visited seasonally by the Nipmuck tribe, primar-



One of Princeton's many historic homes, this one at 16 Merriam Road. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

ily as a hunting area. Many of the town's earliest roads were originally Native American trails, including Brooks Station and Calamint Hill Roads. As European settlement increased during the 18th century, these native trails were improved as colonial highways, such as the northwest route from Lancaster (Hobbs Road-Redemption Rock Trail), the east-west route from Sterling to Hubbardston (Sterling Road-Merriam Road-Thompson Road) and the north-south route from Westminster to Worcester (Taylor Road-Westminster Road-Mountain Road-Worcester Road).

The major portion of what is now Princeton was originally part of the land grant of Rutland. Known as the East Wing, the area was divided in 1718 by the Rutland proprietors into 48 farms. However, the area was not settled until almost 25 years later when the first European settler, Joshua Wilder of Lancaster, arrived in 1742. He settled near what is now the intersection of Gleason and Houghton Roads. The delay in settlement was due in part to the area's rough terrain and heavy

timber, as well as a fear of the area's native population. In 1675, long before the town was settled, Mary Rowlandson of Lancaster was held captive for 12 weeks by native tribes and ransomed at the site of Princeton's "Redemption Rock" from the Indian Chief known as King Philip.

As settlers arrived in the area, most chose to locate in the southern section where the land was better suited for farming. The once heavily-timbered area was subsequently deforested for agriculture. In 1759, Rutland's East Wing and the adjoining area known as "The Watertown Farm" section were combined to establish an independent district. The name Prince Town was selected in honor of the Reverend Thomas Prince, Pastor of the Old South Church in Boston and one of the largest landholders within the district.

Much discussion began over the appropriate location for a meetinghouse, resulting in the selection of a site near the geographic center of the district at one of the community's major road intersections. By 1764, the first Meeting House was built at this location. While the creation of the new Prince Town district allowed residents to establish their own religious congregation and build a meeting house, it did not provide them with separate political representation.

In 1771, Prince Town was incorporated as the Town of Princeton, politically autonomous and separate from Rutland. During this period, a prosperous agricultural settlement flourished, with many notable Federal period residences dispersed throughout the town, including the country estate and gentleman's farm of Governor Moses Gill of Boston. In the early 19th century, Princeton's settlement continued to disperse and a number of high-style residences were built, most notably the Ward Boylston house (ca. 1822) on land near the original site of the Gill Estate on Worcester Road.

Princeton's most prestigious period would follow. By 1860, the town had begun to flourish as a



Princeton's historic Fernside on Mountain Road, now owned and operated by McLean Hospital. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

summer resort because of its clean, cool country air, its relatively easy access from Boston, and the scenic presence of Wachusett Mountain, the highest mountain in Massachusetts east of the Berkshires. As many as seven summer hotels and several boarding houses were built between 1850 and 1890, including the Summit House atop Wachusett Mountain. Eight trains arrived each day from Boston and elsewhere, bringing hundreds of summer visitors and residents to Princeton. Most influential in bringing great numbers of people here were the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Helen Hunt Jackson, and John Greenleaf Whittier, who regularly visited and wrote about Wachusett Mountain and the town of Princeton.

Nineteenth century industrial development occurred primarily in the village of East Princeton along the Keyes Brook. Small-scale manufacturing was established early in the century – consisting of lumbering, burning of charcoal, making of potash, chair-making in several small shops, tanning, boot and shoemaking, and the home manufacturing of palm-leaf hats and straw braid by farmers' wives and daughters. In the 1840s, larger industrial development occurred along the Brook, where chair manufacturing companies were constructed and a linear factory village developed.

The arrival of the automobile in the early 20th century permanently altered the nation's vacation habits and effectively ended Princeton's popularity as a summer resort. During this period, the town's industries gradually disappeared and agriculture, once prominent in the economy, also began its decline. Princeton evolved into a quiet residential community, as it remains today.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Preservation Capacity

Princeton has two active local organizations dedicated to the preservation of Princeton's historic resources: the Princeton Historical Commission and the Princeton Historical Society. These groups participate in preservation planning projects, educational programs, materials conservation and community outreach. While neither organization has staff, both groups have committed members who donate countless volunteer hours to preservation activities. Each organization has a distinct mission, yet they have worked collaboratively in the past on various educational and community projects.

The Princeton Historical Commission is a governmental board appointed by the town to engage in preservation planning activities, including the identification of significant historic resources through cultural resource surveys and National Register of Historic Places nominations. These activities identify buildings, districts, sites, structures and objects that retain their integrity and reflect some significant aspect of local, state or national history. To date, the Princeton Historical Commission has completed cultural resource surveys in East Princeton Village, Russell Corner, Princeton Common and Princeton Center, resulting in the submission of 246 properties into the Massachusetts Historic Commission's Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth. The surveys culminated in the designation of National Register of Historic Places districts in these areas.

The Historical Commission recently completed survey work in the West Village section of Princeton in anticipation of a National Register Nomination for this area, and has nearly completed efforts to prepare a town-wide survey of Princeton's historic resources. Further, the Commission serves in an advisory role for reviewing development projects affecting historic buildings.

The Princeton Historical Society is a non-profit organization whose mission is to "preserve, promote and foster an understanding and appreciation of Princeton's rich heritage (past, present and future) and to be a resource for research and education." The Society maintains the town's repository of historic and cultural artifacts. It manages two spaces in town: the Anita C. Woodward research room in the historic Goodnow Memorial Building (commonly known as the Princeton Public Library), with historic ephemera such as books, genealogical records, house histories, personal and governmental documents, maps and photographs, and the Princeton Historical Society Museum on the second floor of the Princeton Center Building, which contains the Society's collection of historic artifacts such as furniture, paintings, and items from the town's agricultural and industrial past.

The Society also hosts lectures and community programs at the Museum, including local school tours. Its extensive website ([www.princetonmahistory.org](http://www.princetonmahistory.org)) includes historical information on a variety of town resources. The Society's publication, *Glimpses of Princeton Past*, is included in quarterly mailings of the Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD). Recognizing the importance of conservation, the Society has begun the process of scanning historic photographs and books to limit the use of these fragile resources, cataloging its inventory, and identifying archival needs. Future plans include working with local school children within the local history curriculum.

A special subcommittee was formed to assist with developing this chapter of the master plan. The subcommittee included members from both the

Historical Commission and the Historical Society, along with representatives from the Princeton Cultural Council, the Princeton Arts Society and the Princeton Public Library. Together, these organizations serve as the backbone for preservation planning, resource protection and community advocacy in Princeton. Through the master plan process, they have helped to draft cultural and historic resource goals and to identify, list and map Princeton's historic and cultural resources. Their list recognizes far more than the traditional "old house" and includes many types of resources: 18th century Hessian soldier artifacts, stone walls, scenic views, historic farms and scenic roads. The list is not intended to be a complete resource inventory, but rather a starting point for resource identification.

### Historic Buildings

Princeton is blessed with an impressive, well-preserved collection of historic structures spanning more than 250 years, dating from its initial settlement in the mid-18th century through its period of popularity as a summer resort in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The buildings include historic houses, institutional and religious structures, and outbuildings such as barns and carriage houses. The town is fortunate to have a variety of architectural styles represented throughout the community: the Federal style, popular during the early- to mid- 19th century; the Greek Revival, Second Empire and Italianate styles that were fashionable in the mid-19th century; the Queen Anne and Shingle Styles popular during the late 19th century; and the Colonial Revival style of the early 20th century. These historic buildings contribute significantly to Princeton's visual character and provide visual documentation of its pattern of growth over time.

Without a completed resource inventory and accurate GIS maps, it is very difficult to document the number of historic structures in Princeton or their locations. Due to the town's early development history, however, a majority of its buildings



7 Hubbardston Road, Princeton Center. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

are presumed to be historically significant. Local assessor's records indicate that about 145 parcels in Princeton contain structures built prior to 1880, and according to the Historical Commission, approximately 475 houses were built before 1955-56. *The Princeton Story*, published for Princeton's 200th Anniversary in 1959, includes a map of 119 houses built prior to 1859, identifying each home's historic name and date of construction, where available.

While neither of these documents can be considered a complete inventory of historic buildings, they provide a clear indication of Princeton's wealth of older structures and the degree to which they are dispersed throughout town. Still, it is important to remember that more recently constructed buildings may also be historically significant. The National Park Service's criteria for historic significance include buildings that are 50 years old or older. Today, this means that any building constructed prior to 1956 may have historic significance.

Many post-war homes are not perceived as historic in contemporary opinion, yet they provide a glimpse of Princeton's development pattern through the mid-20th century. Three obvious examples of significant 20th century structures include the 1937 Auto Museum, an early 20th



century garage in East Princeton, Hubbard's Garage (ca. 1930) at 106 Main Street, and the recently relocated Blue Bell Diner.

Early in Princeton's development history, most buildings were modest in scale and served as farmsteads or small commercial establishments. Notable exceptions included the early estate of Moses Gill (no longer extant), and later examples such as Boylston Villa on Worcester Road, the Federal style home of Captain Benjamin Harrington (1835) and Fernside at 162 Mountain Road. During the 19th century, however, the town's success as a summer resort resulted in the construction of large summer homes in the popular Victorian styles of the time, along with a number of large inns and hotels.

After Princeton's popularity began to wane, most of these hospitality-related buildings burned and were not reconstructed, though several still exist. For example, the Mount Pleasant House (1868) on Goodnow Road, a grand Second Empire style inn, was purchased in the early 1900s and converted into private residences after a portion of the structure was moved eastward on Goodnow Road. Today, one of the Mount Pleasant House buildings remains a single-family home while the other has been redeveloped as five condominiums. Other remaining examples include earlier private residences that were converted into inns.

Fernside was enlarged for use as a summer boarding house for Harvard professors and students in 1871. Nearly 20 years later (1890), the house became an affordable summer vacation retreat for women working in the factories and shops in Boston. In 1921, the carriage barn was converted to a little theatre, where the women performed plays every Thursday evening. Fernside closed in 1989. The last remaining site to provide overnight accommodations in Princeton, Fernside was recently acquired by McLean Hospital. Other historically significant private buildings include the Harrington Farm and Goodnow Inn, which were



The Dr. Charles Edwin Parker House and associated carriage house at 15 Worcester Road. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

converted from residences into inns to take advantage of the town's popularity to visitors during the 19th century. Harrington Farm now serves as a private event facility while Goodnow Inn is part of the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary, owned by the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Throughout Princeton, the town's older homes define the views from its roadways. These homes are clustered in small hamlets and recognizable groupings that developed in response to both geographic limitations and historic roadway patterns. Each hamlet includes a diverse collection of architectural styles as the settlements evolved over time. It is in these areas (Map 4-1) that the Princeton Historical Commission has focused its inventory and National Register efforts, including the following:

- **The Village of East Princeton:** Developed during the 1800s along Keyes Brook, which provided water power for some of the town's early industry. While none of the area's industrial structures survive, the village's historic linear streetscape pattern remains with its well-preserved collection of Greek Revival style homes built for the area's mill owners, and more modest Greek Revival style workers' housing with distinctive gable-end facades

and classical details. Of particular note is Mechanic's Hall (1852), a Greek Revival style building now owned by the Town of Princeton, and the Stick Style Congregational Chapel (1885) at 81 Main Street, which is now a private dwelling.

- **Town Center:** This development at the junction of Mountain, Hubbardston and Worcester Roads and Boylston Avenue became the municipal center of Princeton when the Town's third Meeting House was built in 1838 (two previous meeting houses had been constructed to the north on a hilltop site). In the 1880s, the generosity and planning vision of Edward Goodnow created the town center of today. Goodnow provided the funding for construction of the Goodnow Memorial Building in 1883, and facilitated the relocation of the Congregational Church to its present site on the east side of the common on Mountain Road to allow for the construction of Bagg Hall (1885) on its original site. These two imposing municipal structures at the crest of the common provide commanding views over the town center. The common is also surrounded by 19th and early 20th century homes built in response to the community's heyday as a summer resort.

- **Russell Corner:** One of the town's earliest concentrations of Federal style homes around a four-acre green in the vicinity of Merriam and Sterling Roads.

Most of Princeton's historic structures are privately owned, but there are a few important structures in public and non-profit ownership. The Town of Princeton owns four buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Three of the buildings are located in the Town Center area and are relatively well-preserved, and the fourth is in East Princeton:

- **Goodnow Memorial Building:** Constructed in 1883 in the Richardsonian style, in granite



Mechanics Hall, 104 Main Street in East Princeton.  
(Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

with brownstone trim. Designed by architect Stephen C. Earle and constructed by builders, Norcross Brothers.

- **Bagg Hall:** Constructed in 1885, this Victorian Gothic/Romanesque Revival style building was designed by architect Stephen C. Earle.
- **Princeton Center Building:** Constructed in 1906 in the Shingle Style. The second floor was the town's high school, and the primary and intermediate grades occupied the first floor.
- **Mechanics Hall:** Built in 1852 by the Town of Princeton, Mechanics Hall is an impressive Greek Revival style structure at the entrance to East Princeton Village. From its beginnings as a school, Mechanics Hall has served many functions: space used the Mechanics Association and later, as meeting space for the East Princeton Improvement Society and a branch library. The East Princeton Improvement Society eventually vacated the building in the early 1970s.

Mechanics Hall has been the subject of much local interest as Princeton struggles to find a reuse for it. The building has been inspected a few times in order to estimate renovation costs. Several issues need to be resolved,

including the site's ability to accommodate a septic system (there is currently no on-site wastewater disposal), limited parking and access barriers for people with disabilities. One study (ca. 1997) determined that the required renovations would cost about \$350,000. Rising construction costs since then may place this estimate closer to \$1M today.

About 10 years ago, the town installed a new roof in order to protect Mechanics Hall from further deterioration. In 2004, residents were polled for their opinions about the building's future. Most of the survey respondents said they wanted the town to retain ownership of Mechanics Hall and restore it for public use. An open house in September 2005 was well attended by local residents, many of whom had never been inside building. There has also been some private interest in the building, although no formal offers have been made.

In addition to these municipally-owned buildings, Princeton has several other historically significant properties under public and non-profit ownership:

- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased **Wachusett Mountain** in 1900 in order to preserve the mountain for public use. Many improvements were made to facilitate passive and active recreational use of the mountain, including several structures and landscape features constructed in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Today, the Reservation is operated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation and contains several historically significant structures and landscape features. Many of these features have been inventoried, but no formal historic designation has been completed.
- The **Mount Wachusett State Reservation Superintendent's House and Headquarters** was constructed in 1903-04 on Mountain Road at the base of Wachusett Mountain. The



State Reservation Superintendent's House on Mountain Road. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

building is significant as the first dual-purpose building (residence and headquarters) erected for a state park system. Today, this transitional Shingle/Colonial Revival building is vacant.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is currently undertaking a multi-phase project to reuse the building for an Environmental Education and Research Center (EERC). Phase I has been completed, including renovation of the garage with an addition of a second-floor activity room, as well as installation of a well and septic system and an updated electrical supply. The yet-to-be-funded phases include renovation of the main house for meeting rooms, display areas, office space and researcher quarters.

This site is not listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places. An inventory form was completed for the building, recognizing its historic significance, but a determination of eligibility by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) was inconclusive because the agency needed more information.

- The Commonwealth also owns a second historic structure located within the Reservation, the **Olive Gates House** at 90 Westminster Road. Most recently, this ca. 1840 Greek Revival style house was leased for use as a

private residence, but it is currently vacant. The property has not been surveyed.

- The **Edward Goodnow Inn** at 113 Goodnow Road is owned by the non-profit Massachusetts Audubon Society as part of the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary. The historic farmhouse was constructed in 1786 by Edward Goodnow Sr. and served as an inn for 21 years when the Boston-Barre stage line opened in 1823 in front of the house. The Goodnow family sold the farm in 1918 to Charles Crocker, who used it as a summer home and “gentleman’s” farm. The farm also contains several other historically significant features, including an early 20th century gambrel roofed barn and stonewalls found throughout the property. The main house/property has been surveyed and a historic structures report has been completed for the main house. An updated inventory form is being prepared and the Historical Commission hopes to pursue a National Register nomination for this property in the near future.

Princeton is fortunate that most of its privately-owned historic buildings are in a good state of preservation, with few inappropriate alterations evident on the exterior. To date, the town has not experienced many requests to demolish older structures for new construction. However, several vacant buildings need restoration, including the historic school building on School House Road, ca. 1799, which has been vacant for many years and exhibits signs of extreme deterioration. Its close proximity to wetlands limits expansion of this one-room building and ultimately limits the site’s development potential.

## Historic Farms

Early settlers developed farms primarily in the southern and western sections of Princeton, where soil conditions were more amenable to agricultural development. Forested land was cleared for farm-



Goodnow Inn at Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary, 113 Goodnow Road. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

ing, and fields were marked by stretches of stone walls. A ca. 1860 primitive painting of Brooks Farm from the Princeton Historical Society’s collection provides a panoramic northeasterly view of Wachusett Mountain and the town center, showing its vast acreages of farmland and open space.

As agriculture grew less profitable and land became increasingly valuable during the 20th century, Princeton gradually lost its farming culture and the last two dairy farms closed within the past decade. There are still several farms in operation, but they are no longer livestock-related. New growth forests emerged as Princeton’s expansive fields were left untilled, yet the agrarian past remains visible in the town’s barns, outbuildings, stonewalls and historic farm houses that dot the landscape. Today, the remaining farms provide some of Princeton’s most impressive scenic vistas and contribute to its rural character.

Several farms have limited or permanent protection through various means. However, while these designations help to preserve agricultural landscapes, the farm structures have no comparable level of protection. Two notable historic farms remaining in operation today include:

- **Goodnow Inn:** The Massachusetts Audubon Society has owned the Goodnow Inn since 1946, when the Crocker family donated its



1,100 acres for use as the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary. The farm retains three outbuildings still in use for housing, a small livestock collection and farming equipment. The gambrel roofed barn dating from the Crocker family is particularly striking. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities completed a historic structures report on the historic farmhouse. Some renovation work was completed on an ell of the farmhouse to comply with ADA standards and to provide laboratory and educational space. The Society plans to complete some interior cosmetic work on the historic portion of the building.

- **Stimson Farm:** Located on Thompson Road, this “Century Farm” has been in the same family since it was constructed in 1743. It still retains its original farmhouse and barn. The family sold the development rights to the farm in 1987, permanently protecting it for agricultural use through the state’s Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

Historic farms are composed of more than their landscapes and farmhouses. The loss of agricultural outbuildings and stone walls will permanently alter the landscape and begin to eclipse the visual qualities of “place” that make Princeton special. Deferred maintenance and inactivity further contribute to the demise of these structures, as does their lack of flexibility in redevelopment. Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive inventory makes it difficult to protect them.

## Barns

Princeton’s old barns are community landmarks that serve as a visual reminder of the town’s agrarian past. While most of the town’s historic farmhouses have been well-preserved, the same cannot be said for many of its remaining barns. For those barns still in use, the structures appear to be in relatively sound condition. However, many of the



Property at 66 Main Street, East Princeton, including the Stuart Barn. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

vacant or unused barns show evidence of serious deterioration. The nature of a barn’s building construction, such as no foundation and sill on grade, contributes to its deterioration unless the barn is regularly maintained and repaired.

Princeton does not have a complete inventory of its historic barns and related agrarian outbuildings. To date, the town has not undertaken a concerted effort to encourage the preservation of these historic and cultural resources, but the Princeton Historical Commission has begun documenting the history of several older farms.

Princeton also has many mid- to late-19th century residential and industrial-related barns or carriage houses. Many are attached to their associated houses, as was a common building practice throughout New England during the 19th

century. Examples of these outbuildings can be seen adjoining houses in East Princeton and in the Town Center. A notable one is the Stuart Barn at 66 Main Street in East Princeton. This Gothic Style barn served as an overnight storage facility for chairs made at the Stuart chair factory and as a stable for horses.

## Stone Walls

Stone walls supply physical evidence of a town's agrarian heritage. They delineate the historic development pattern of land ownership and agricultural use. In Princeton, stone walls exist throughout the town along and within now-forested land, along scenic roads and bordering the perimeter of the remaining farmland and open space. Deferred maintenance and natural erosion have caused many of these dry-laid stone walls to deteriorate. Princeton does not have an inventory of its stone walls, but some notable examples include:

- Stone wall along the perimeter of the Town Pound (1768) on Mountain Road
- Stone wall along Thompson Road
- Stone walls built by Hessian soldiers during the 18th century near the intersection of Routes 31 & 62 along Gregory Hill Road
- Stone wall across from Fernside
- Stone wall on Sam Cobb Lane
- Stone wall near 38 Radford Road

Zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations usually provide little protection for stone walls during development. In Massachusetts, many communities have adopted the provisions of M.G.L. c.40, s.15C, the Scenic Roads Act, to provide some degree of protection for stone walls and significant trees within the public right-of-way of roads



Keyes Brook, viewed from Gleason Road, flowing under the stone arch bridge. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

designated as scenic. Several years ago, however, Princeton town meeting rejected a proposal to designate scenic roads.

## Scenic Landscapes

Princeton's open spaces and scenic landscapes contribute as much to the town's culture and sense of place as its historic structures. The town has a wealth of existing landscapes that have retained their agricultural character and natural and scenic qualities. These sites have not been surveyed as part of a town-wide cultural resource inventory, and other than a partial listing in the 1990 Open Space and Recreation Plan, they have not been fully documented. In addition to sites with recognized natural and scenic qualities identified in the Open Space chapter, Princeton has other heritage landscapes with cultural significance:

- Redemption Rock on Route 140, north of the intersection with Route 31, is now owned by The Trustees of Reservations, which has erected a state highway historic marker to document the site where ransom was paid to Indians to release Mary Rowlandson in 1675.
- The waterfalls just off Route 140 on Gleason Road not only provide a scenic view of Keyes

Brook, but also provide views of the remnants of East Princeton's industrial mills and a historic stone arch bridge.

## Heritage Trees

Many of Princeton's roadways are lined with some of the community's oldest trees, indicative of the town's agrarian heritage where land was often deforested except along roadways and property boundaries. A fine example is the majestic trees and stone walls at Bryn Coron Farm along the roadway edge of Route 62, as well as the old trees on the green at Russell Corner. Princeton's mature tree population is contending not only with the stresses associated with natural aging but also the environmental harm caused by road salt.

## Scenic Roadways

One of the major features that contribute to Princeton's rural character is its scenic roadways. The town's 250 years of transportation patterns endure today. Lined with mature trees and stone walls, many of these roadways retain their narrow width and winding routes. They also provide unmatched views to some of the town's most scenic rural vistas. Other features that contribute to a road's rural quality include details such as guard rail design. In Princeton, there are a variety of guard rails present, ranging from older cable-style rails, many of which are deteriorated and no longer meet safety standards, to more modern steel guardrails.

## Cemeteries

Princeton has several town-owned cemeteries and one privately owned burial plot that is maintained by the town. The cemeteries include:

- South Cemetery
- West Cemetery
- Woodlawn Cemetery
- Meeting House Cemetery
- West Sterling Cemetery/Parker I
- Parker II/Beaman Road
- North Cemetery
- Boylston Burying Ground, a private burial plot of the Boylston family, owned by a private trust. Since the trust has limited funds, the town maintains the burial plot.



Views from the road in Princeton. Hall's Field, Gregory Hill Road (above), approaching the town center, and looking west along Hubbardston Road (below). (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)





Only two of these cemeteries have been surveyed as part of the town's inventory: Boylston Burial Ground (1828-1893) and Meeting House Cemetery (1770-1897). The town is currently cataloging Woodlawn Cemetery into a town database system, using burial records kept in Bagg Hall. The remaining cemeteries will also be included. Other than the Boylston family burial ground, it is unclear whether other private family burial plots exist in Princeton. The Historical Commission has requested funds from town meeting this year to begin restoring monuments in Meeting House Cemetery. There has been no monument restoration work in Princeton since 1959.



Meeting House Cemetery on Mountain Road. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

## Archaeological Resources

With more than four centuries of Native American and European settlement, Princeton has a very high potential for archaeologically significant sites located throughout the community. According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), Princeton has four documented ancient Native American sites of unknown dates and 14 documented historic archaeological sites. Historic sites include the remains of industrial sites in East Princeton, including an 18th century grist mill and a 19th century dam on Keyes Brook, as well as the stone foundation of one of the chair factory buildings and stone-lined waterway. Other archaeological resources identified in Princeton include the original sites of the Methodist Church, the Moses Gill Estate foundation on the site of Boylston Villa, and the foundation of the Joshua Wilder House on land now owned by Norco Rod and Gun Club.

## PAST PLANS, STUDIES & REPORTS

Princeton has not completed a preservation plan that focuses on historic and cultural resources, but local plans prepared over the past 30 years have recognized, at least implicitly, the role that Princeton's heritage plays in defining its character as a rural, scenic community. Still, while past plans have identified historic preservation as an

important goal for the community, their attention to historic resources is fairly uneven, with some including only a sentence or two and others listing preservation goals and objectives. For example, the Princeton Town Plan (1970) listed preservation of the town's rural, scenic quality as a master plan goal, yet the 1975 Town Plan makes only minimal reference to several historic sites, namely Redemption Rock and Fernside as they relate to conservation land. Other than a brief recognition of Princeton's historic resources, the 1986 Town Plan Report makes no mention of preservation-related goals. However, the Princeton Town Plan 1980-1985 made three specific recommendations for historic resource protection:

- Establish a local historic district (M.G.L. c.40C) in the Town Center, including the town common and surrounding homes and institutional buildings;
- Acquire land to create buffers around the town's historic cemeteries; and
- Adopt a scenic roads bylaw and regulations.

In 1991, the Land Use Development Plan also recommended that Princeton consider adopting a local historic district bylaw under M.G.L. c.40C to protect the historic character of the Town Cen-



ter. It also recommended a Scenic Roads Bylaw, which town meeting subsequently rejected.

Princeton's most recent Open Space and Recreation Plan (2000) provides the most in-depth discussion of historic resources and includes an inventory of some of the town's scenic, cultural and historic areas. The plan embraced several historic and cultural resource goals and objectives, as reflected in the following excerpts:

*Protection and enhancement of the natural environment through:*

- Land acquisitions that enhance current natural attributes (e.g. open fields, stone walls, farmlands, scenic views) which significantly define the rural character of Princeton.

*Protection/preservation of scenic landscape, open meadows, and agricultural fields which preserve the community character through:*

- Local awareness of Princeton's natural, geological and historic resources via inventories maintained by appropriate town-appointed boards/committees.
- Preservation and promotion of activities involving the development and exploration of historic sites, agricultural activities and geological features.

*Preservation of existing open space areas and areas of outstanding beauty through:*

- Permanent protection of documented historic sites listed in the town registry.
- Creation of an inventory of scenic roads, vistas and fields of public interest.

Despite the erratic attention to historic and cultural resource protection in Princeton's earlier plans, the town has pursued several preservation planning initiatives. Even without legislation in place to require protection of buildings, Princeton has preserved its historic resources through private and public action. After the automobile effectively dismantled the town's summer tourism industry, many large summer homes fell out of favor, including some of the earliest estates such as Boylston Villa and Fernside. Residents have undertaken private restoration efforts to return these homes to their original grandeur. Fernside's former owners spent 2 ½ years restoring the building before reopening it as the Fernside Inn in 1996. When the property was sold to McLean Hospital in 2006, the Historical Commission met with hospital representatives to discuss the continued preservation of this landmark.

The town has invested in preserving its own historic buildings, too. During the 1990s, Princeton received a Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) grant from MHC to repair the roof of Bagg Hall. Since MPPF is a matching grant, the town had to contribute 50% of the repair costs. As a condition of the grant, a preservation restriction was placed on the building, requiring MHC approval of any future work undertaken on Bagg Hall. While this project met a critical maintenance need, it did not include restoring the building's second-floor interior, where traces of original ornamental painting can be seen on the meeting room's ceiling as later layers of paint have peeled away.

In 2001, Princeton received a Preservation Award from MHC for renovations to the Princeton Public Library (1999-2001). The town obtained a matching grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners to pay for interior renovations and restoration work, which cost a total of \$896,330.<sup>1</sup> In the past, Princeton had a mainte-

<sup>1</sup> Wendy Pape, Library Director, Princeton Public Library Long-Range Plan 2005-2010, 9.



The Smith Farm on Hubbardston Road, including the Federal-style Benjamin Cheever/George Mason House (ca. 1780) and dairy barn (top), and the Stimson Farm on Thompson Road (right), two examples of the agricultural resources identified by the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program as “high importance” for preservation planning. (Photos by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)



nance fund to preserve the building’s slate roof, but other capital needs and limited revenue have made it difficult for the town to continue this practice. Princeton also converted the Princeton Center Building into private office and community space when the former school was decommissioned in the 1990s. Today, the Princeton Historical Society, the Princeton Arts Society, the Council on Aging, a yoga facility and private studios occupy space in the building and provide some revenue for building maintenance. Finally, the town has begun the process of documenting Princeton’s resources through historical surveys and National Register nominations.

### Princeton’s Historic Resource Inventory

According to MHC, Princeton has a partially complete inventory of its historic resources. The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) report for Princeton indicates that about 246 buildings, burial grounds, objects, structures and areas have been inventoried. The inventory forms are on file at the Princeton Public Library and MHC. While many of the building forms were recently completed and they include a resource’s historic, architectural and contextual significance, the town recognized that it needed

to look town-wide and include a composite of all types of historic resources, including stone walls, outbuildings, landscapes, cemeteries, bridges and area forms. The Historical Commission initiated this process with assistance from MHC and has nearly finished a town-wide survey.

## National Register Historic Districts

Princeton currently has three National Register Districts and one National Register Individually Listed Property:<sup>2</sup>

- East Princeton Historic District: Listed on 3/18/2004, with 91 contributing properties.
- Princeton Center Historic District: Listed on 2/26/1999, with five contributing properties; expanded on March 10, 2006 to include an additional 103 properties.
- Russell Corner Historic District, which includes 32 buildings and one archaeological site.
- Fernside, Vacation Home for Working Girls: Listed on 6/27/2002 as an individual property.

The Historical Commission also has completed historic survey work to begin the process of a National Register Nomination for West Village. More recently, the Commission and a preservation consultant inventoried the Four Corners area, including 13 properties, and MHC has determined that it is eligible for listing on the National Register. In addition, it recently installed historic district signage at the entrances to East Princeton Village along Main Street. Several buildings within the district have individual National Register plaques.

## Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Princeton recently participated in a program offered by the Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) to identify and document heritage landscapes that are vital to the town's history, character and quality of life. The Heritage Landscape Inventory Program is designed to increase awareness about the many different

types of heritage landscapes found throughout the Commonwealth and to help communities plan for their preservation. DCR worked closely with local officials and residents to identify Princeton's heritage landscapes and to determine appropriate preservation tools for several of the most critical areas. This work culminated in the *Princeton Reconnaissance Report* (2006), which the town can employ as a framework for future preservation activities related to heritage landscapes.

## ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Like so many initiatives in Princeton, the preservation of historic resources has been accomplished mainly on a voluntary basis. Many residents say they cherish Princeton's historic buildings, stone walls and tree-lined roads, yet the town has been unsuccessful at instituting legislation to provide long-term or perpetual protection for these resources.

Princeton does not have a demolition delay bylaw or local historic districts under M.G.L. c.40C, which is unusual for a town with such a vast collection of cultural artifacts. In addition, the town has not accepted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), a law that provides funds for the preservation of historic resources and open space and the creation of affordable housing. To date, more than 120 cities and towns in the Commonwealth have adopted the CPA. A surcharge of up to 3.0% may be placed on local real estate tax levies, and some exemptions are allowed by local option. Currently, the state will match any funds raised by a community through its Community Preservation Trust Fund.

Princeton's 1980 and 1991 master plan updates recommended that the town accept the provisions of M.G.L. c.40, s.15C, and adopt a Scenic Roadway Bylaw to protect the rural, natural, historic and scenic qualities of roadways that contribute to Princeton's rural ambiance. The 1991 Land Use Development Plan included a proposed bylaw for

<sup>2</sup> Phil Beggin, National Register Program, Massachusetts Historical Commission

town meeting action and listed 42 specific roads or portions thereof for scenic roads designation, based on the recommendations of a subcommittee that worked on the project. The proposed bylaw would have regulated any “repair, maintenance, reconstruction, or paving work” that involved cutting or removing trees or altering stone walls by requiring the consent of the Planning Board, following a public hearing. If the road work did not involve cutting trees or tearing down stone walls, no public hearing would be required.

People do not agree that a scenic roads bylaw is appropriate for Princeton. Some residents think all of the town’s roads should be classified as scenic because they exhibit important scenic characteristics, and others are concerned that a scenic roads bylaw could make it difficult for the Highway Department to take care of Princeton’s streets. Communities throughout the state have enacted scenic roads bylaws, in some cases applying the regulations to all roadways and in others to a specific list of roads designated by town meeting.

By state law, only roads accepted by the town as public ways can be designated as scenic roads. State numbered routes are not eligible. However, any federally funded or permitted roadway work must be reviewed under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to determine its impacts on any resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Further, work involving cutting or trimming of trees not associated with road improvements (such as by a utility company) is covered by the Public Shade Tree Act, M.G.L. c.87. This law prohibits trimming or removing any tree touching on a public right-of-way without a hearing before the tree warden. Like all towns, Princeton receives state Chapter 90 funds for roadway improvements. When Chapter 90 funds were used to improve Mountain Road, the project included installation of guard rails with weathering steel and wood posts, which many consider to be more appropriate for rural communities than the

traditional steel guardrails on highways. Currently, Princeton does not have a policy on design standards for guardrails.

Princeton is not alone in its struggle to preserve the historic and cultural resources that define its rural ambiance. Other communities throughout Massachusetts and the nation also find it difficult to save cultural artifacts such as stone walls, old barns, heritage landscapes and historic buildings. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Massachusetts and the Stone Wall Initiative (SWI) are just a few of the preservation groups that provide technical assistance and funds to help communities preserve their heritage. Many of these organizations have extensive websites that can assist local officials with preservation activities. Collaborating with regional preservation organizations can also assist Princeton in its historic and cultural endeavors.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Community Preservation Act**

As recommended in the Open Space and Natural Resources chapter, Princeton needs to consider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA). Throughout the master plan process, members of the master plan committee and other residents said many times that Princeton should have resources to acquire open space. However, it is also crucial to protect and preserve historic built assets.

The visual character of every town is defined not only by landscapes, but also by buildings, and Princeton is no exception. It often is easier to build support for saving land from development than for saving historic buildings from deterioration, disinvestment or outright demolition. Princeton has many historic preservation needs: renovating the second floor of Baggs Hall, resolving the fate of Mechanics Hall, and making repairs in historic cemeteries. These kinds of projects usu-



ally need a dedicated revenue stream even more than open space.

In addition, state laws permit communities to acquire land for open space and other public uses, but preserving privately owned buildings is generally not an allowable use of local revenue. However, communities can invest CPA funds in historic properties and may, in exchange, require a historic preservation deed restriction, depending on how the CPA revenue is spent. Finally, access to CPA funds would enable the Historical Commission to apply for matching grants from the state to conduct preservation planning studies and prepare National Register nominations.



Historic Bagg Hall needs interior renovations in order for the second-floor meeting hall to be used for public functions. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

## Preservation Planning

The Princeton Historical Commission needs the town's support to compete for state grants that help communities carry out preservation planning and preservation projects. In Princeton, historic preservation has been a matter of stewardship by committed volunteers, but Princeton has preservation needs that go beyond what volunteers can do on their own. To qualify for preservation grants, a city or town has to provide local funds as a match. The grants are paid on a reimbursement basis, which means the community must spend local funds first. If Princeton voters decide that adopting CPA is not in their best interest, the town will need to consider other ways to fund preservation activities.

The second floor of historic Bagg Hall should be restored for public use, which means the facility must be made accessible to people with disabilities. The town's most at-risk historic building, Mechanics Hall, continues to deteriorate because Princeton has not had the funds to restore it. Even though the Princeton Public Library was recently renovated, it needs preventive maintenance and some modest repairs. A common problem in many towns is that following a major public

building project, little if any funding is placed in reserve to maintain and protect the asset. Further, Princeton needs a suitable storage facility for historic artifacts and documents, and the town's historic burial grounds need restoration work as well. Some of these projects may seem like dispensable luxuries, but they will be lost opportunities if the town does not begin to address them very soon.

## Preservation Tools

The town should study whether to designate Princeton Center and East Princeton as local historic districts under M.G.L. c.40C, or alternatively, neighborhood conservation districts. Local historic districts offer the most effective legal protection against destruction of or inappropriate alterations to historic buildings. In addition, Princeton should consider establishing a demolition delay bylaw that would apply to any building over 50 years of age, regardless of its location. Another way to approach demolition delay is to limit its applicability to a list of buildings already determined to be historically significant, based on a cultural resource survey or a preservation plan.

## National Register Nominations for State Property

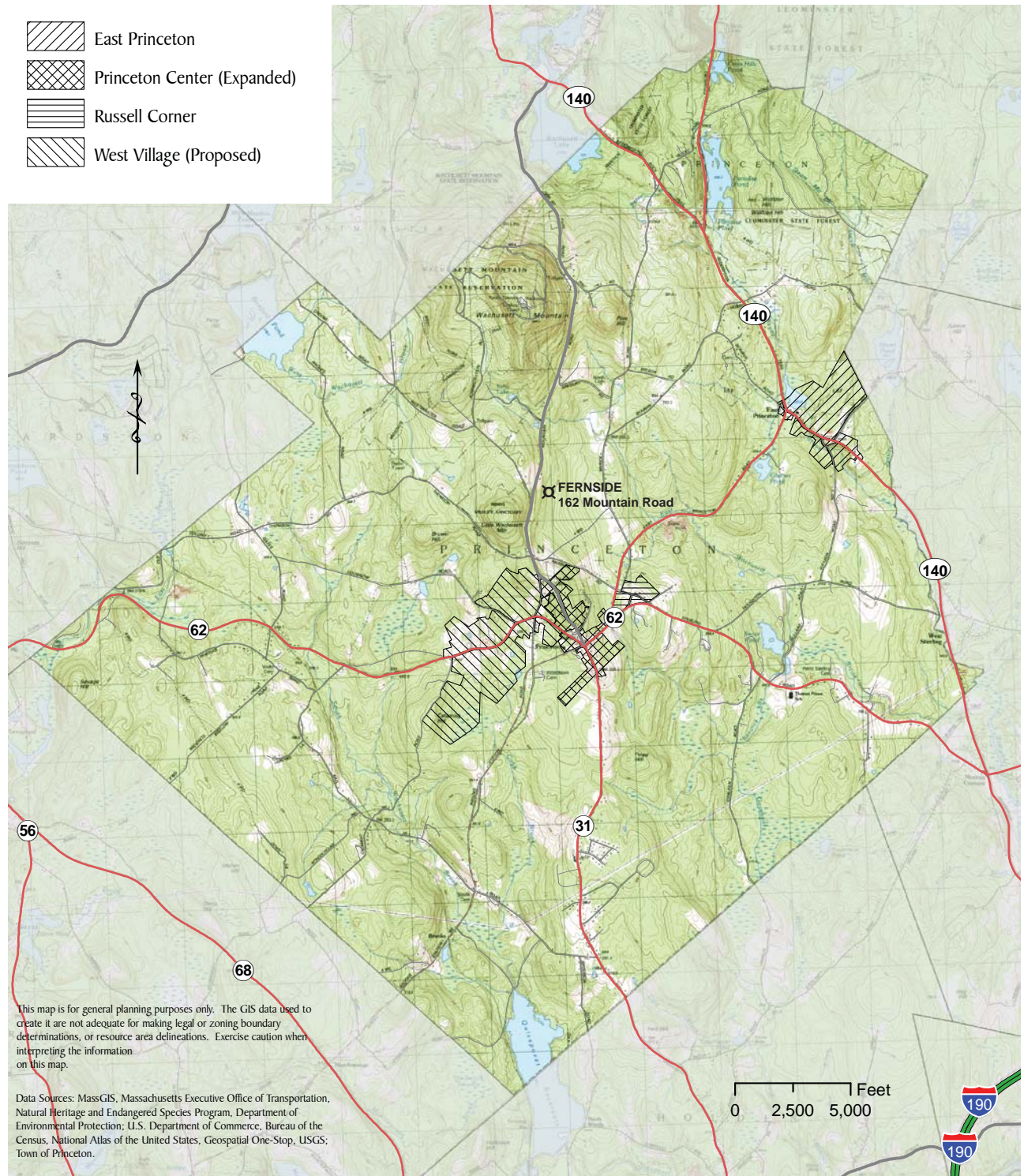
The Town of Princeton has taken many steps to identify and document historic buildings and seek historic district nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. For a small town that has no staff planner, Princeton has accomplished more with qualified, committed volunteers than many suburbs that have the financial and staff resources for preservation planning and preservation projects. Both the town and private homeowners have taken stewardship of Princeton's historic resources very seriously.



The state owns two historically significant buildings in Princeton: the State Reservation Superintendent's House and Headquarters on Mountain Road and the Olive Gates House at 90 Westminster Road. Unfortunately, they are not listed on the National Register and there are no mechanisms in place to protect them. The town should work with its state legislators, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) to ensure that the Commonwealth follows through with National Register nominations for these buildings.

The Olive Gates House on Westminster Road, owned by the state, has no mechanisms in place to protect it from inappropriate alterations or demolition. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)





Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

## MASTER PLAN

### 4.1 NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICTS

(Approximate Boundaries)



Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.

Larry Koff & Associates

Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, inc.

*This page intentionally left blank.*