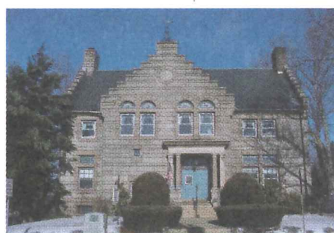


LEICESTER CENTER

1 TOWN COMMON

Leicester's common typifies the Massachusetts town common, having retained its picturesque eminence when the original Boston Post Road was bypassed and Route 9 was rebuilt in the 1920's. The north side of the common is the sight of religious and government structures. The Federated Church was constructed of stone in 1901. It replaced the original Town Meeting House and the First Congregational Church. The current Town Hall was constructed in 1939 to replace the old town hall (built in 1852), destroyed by fire. The Unitarian Church was built in 1834, and Leicester's Unitarian Society was among the first in this area. The founding minister, Reverend Samuel May, was a staunch abolitionist and secretary of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society. His home, a site of the Underground Railroad, still stands on the east side of the common. In the 1880's Booker T. Washington and members of the Tuskegee Institute delivered an oration from the steps of this church on May's work in the abolition movement. The south side of the common has many stately homes built in the later part of the 18th Century and the early 19th century. The common was used by townspeople for leisure and sports activities as it is today. It was also used as a drill field for the local company of militia as far back as the 1740's.



2 PUBLIC LIBRARY

Leicester had a library as far back as 1791, but no real building to call home until 1861. Lory Watson, whose mill stands nearby, donated \$25,000 for the construction of a new library. Many mill owners became "benefactors" to the town in which they lived, and Watson was one of several. Constructed of Milford pink granite, the current building was designed by the famous architect, Stephen Earle, free of charge. Today, a small museum is located on the second floor.



3 MURDOCK MANSION

The Murdock home is really the last of the great mansions built by prosperous mill owners. Joseph Murdock built the home sometime in the 1860's, across from the mill he ran with his brother, Joshua. J&J Murdock Card Clothing was mostly destroyed by fire, although Russell Manufacturing later produced playing cards and games in the remaining portions of the mill. Today, a door and window outlet occupies the shop. The Murdock Mansion was used for many years as the rectory for the adjacent St. Pius Church, built in the 1950's, until it was sold and restored in 1994.

4 WATSON'S MILL

The only remaining mill in Leicester Center was built in

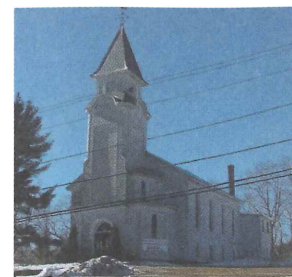
GREENVILLE



1861 by Lory S. Watson. This mill represents a change in Leicester's industrial past as it was built at a time when mills were moving away from water with the advent of steam power. Typical of the Victorian era, the original portion of the building has a Mansard roof, although the original bell tower is gone. This mill, like many others in town produced hand and machine cards, as well as wire heddles and shuttles used in the machines of the textile industry. The fire station behind the mill was provided to the town by the Watson's when the town bought its first motorized fire apparatus in 1922.

5 RAWSON BROOK BURIAL GROUND

This cemetery dates as far back as the 1730's as indicated by dates appearing on headstones. Though no longer in use, it is the final resting place for many local veterans, especially of the American Revolution. Perhaps the most prominent is Colonel William Henshaw. Henshaw was an officer in the local company of militia at a time when his brother, Joseph, chaired the meeting of the Committee of Safety held in Worcester in 1774. At that meeting, William Henshaw stated, "We must have companies of men ready to march upon a minute's notice." Thus the term, the Minutemen, for which Massachusetts is so famous, was born.

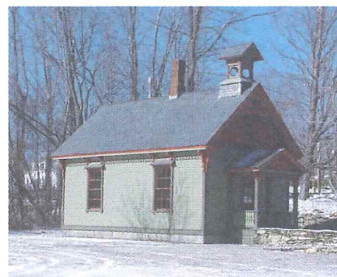


6 GREENVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH

The Greenville Baptist Society was formed in 1738 and had close ties with the Anabaptists in nearby Sutton. The current church, built in 1860, stands across the street from the home of Samuel Green for whom the village is named. Green was the first town selectman, moderator, and assessor. The Green family gained prominence in later decades for establishing Green Hill Park in Worcester and Central Park in New York City, as well as public libraries in those cities.

7 GREENVILLE FIRE STATION COPELAND LIBRARY

This Greenville Fire Station was constructed in 1884 to house Chemical Engine Company #3 of the Leicester Fire

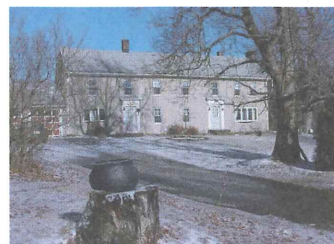


Department. It was built with funds provided by J.D. Clark whose mill stood across the street. Fire companies were an integral part of village life, and the competition between the town villages was fierce. The Greenville Fire Station was one of two identical structures built at the same time, the other in the village of Rochdale. This building was converted to a branch library in 1901, paid for by Ephiram Copeland, a wealthy village resident. It remained as such until the 1960's when it was closed. The building was restored in its original colors as a fire station in the early 1990's.

ROCHDALE

8 SAMUEL GREEN TAVERN

This house is among the oldest in the town of Leicester and was built by Thomas Green,



brother of Samuel, sometime in the early 1720's. Since Leicester had been purchased in 1686 and settled in 1713 (not long after the end of King Phillip's War and Queen Anne's War), it was constructed as a garrison house. There were rumors that soldiers of the King were billeted here during the period of the French & Indian War. Doctor Thomas Green, founder of the Baptist Society in the village, operated an unofficial medical school from this house, training over a hundred physicians. Thomas Green's grandson, also named Samuel, ran a tavern in this house until 1785.

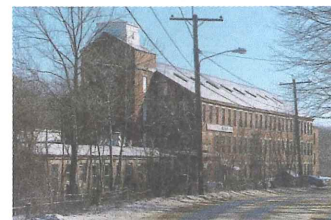
9 ROCHDALE SCHOOL

Although Leicester had a central high school, every village maintained a separate grammar school. The Rochdale School is perhaps the most visible icon of the best preserved mill village in Leicester. In Rochdale, one can still find the village school, store, fire barn, mills and mill housing. The school was constructed in 1910 on land donated to the town by E.G. Carleton, owner of Carleton Woolen Mills, located farther up the old Stafford Turnpike. The small red building next to the school was the Rochdale Branch of the Leicester Public Library.

10 CARLETON WOOLEN MILL

It was common in New England mill communities to see several different mills built on the same site due to the availability of water to power them. Rochdale had seen several mills built along the French River as far back as 1737. The Carleton Woolen Mill was built in 1854, its owner also owning the mill immediately downstream. The chief foreman of the mill was E.G. Carleton who purchased the mill in 1890. It was run by the Carleton Family until 1935 but retained the Carleton name until the 1970's.

11 R.S. DENNY WOOLEN MILL (MKM)



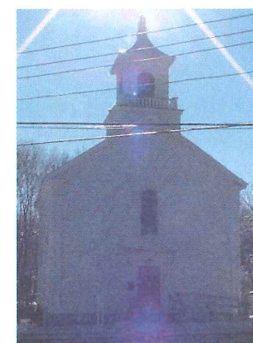
Downstream from Carleton Woolen Mill stands the mill built by Reuben Swan Denny in about 1847. This was the third mill to be located on this site. The mill that was previously on this site was built by Joshua Clapp in 1829. At the same time, he purchased all the mills in Rochdale, which was known as South Leicester at that time. It was Clapp who really began to establish the village as it is today, and the village was named Clappville. Andrew Howarth later constructed the large addition to the mill on the river side of the building. In 1928, the mill was purchased by the Manchester Knitting Mills of Manchester, New Hampshire. Most people today still refer to the building as MKM. During the 1960's this mill produced M-14 rifles for the U.S. Government

CHERRY VALLEY

under contract from Harrington & Richardson.

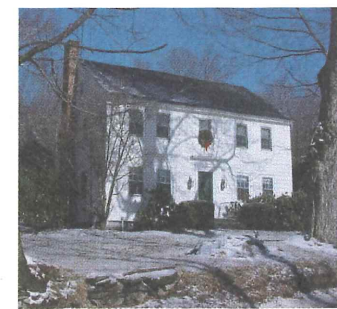
12 CHERRY VALLEY METHODIST CHURCH

Cherry Valley's was the second Methodist church in Leicester, this one being non-Wesleyan. The current building was constructed in 1856 after the original was destroyed by fire. On April 1, 1876 the church was severely damaged in the Great Lynde Brook Flood. The dam at Lynde Brook Reservoir failed, sending a deluge through Cherry Valley and Webster Square in Worcester.



13 HOMER EARLE SARGENT HOUSE

Homer Earle Sargent grew up in the house at the corner of Sargent and Main Streets (now Sargent's Country Barn). The house was built around 1841 to replace a home built in 1746. Sargent became manager of the Michigan Central Railroad in Chicago where he established the well known Chicago Stock Yards.



14 NATHAN SARGENT HOUSE



This house was built in 1742 by Nathan Sargent on the original Boston Post Road. When Leicester's company of Minutemen began the march to Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, they stopped at this house to collect ammunition as Sargent had taken all the weights from his clocks and melted them into shot. During Shay's Rebellion in 1787, Luke Day, a leader of the insurrection and one of Shay's lieutenants, stopped here to seek shelter from a life-threatening storm. Sargent refused to offer aid to the insurgent who was astonished he could be turned away in such a storm.

15 LOGAN HOUSE



James Logan was President of the American Envelope Company in Worcester and a benefactor of the village of Cherry Valley. He donated land and money for the construction of Towtaid Park, which is located behind the Cherry Valley Methodist Church. He also donated money to the Church itself after it was damaged by the Lynde Brook Flood of 1876.

hood destroyed. It is also for this reason that the community did not openly embrace the abolition movement that was sweeping the area. Wealthy mill owners did not want to see their textile supplies disappear and thus did not support the movement. When one of the town's prominent citizens became deeply involved with the movement, a conflict broiled in the community.

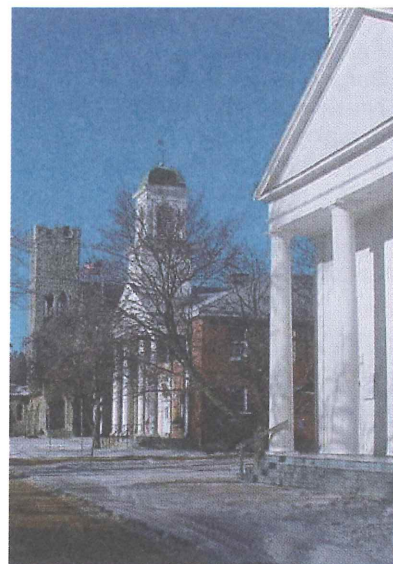
Rev. Samuel May was pastor of the Unitarian Church, a position he was asked to vacate when mill owning parishioners felt he was devoting too much time to his position as Secretary of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. May had worked with many prominent abolitionists such as Lucy Stone and Abby Kelly Foster. May's home on the east end of the town common is a confirmed site on the Underground Railroad. After May's death, Booker T. Washington along with members of the Tuskegee Institute delivered a speech on May's work on the steps of the Unitarian Church that May had been asked to leave.

The 1880's saw the beginning of the decline of industry in Leicester. At the height of the industrial revolution, one-third of all hand and machine cards made in North America were produced in Leicester. Other famous industrialists such as Elias Howe, Henry Graton, Joseph Knight, and Ichabod Washburn also got their beginnings in Leicester's carding industry. However, the new cheap labor available in the south forced many companies to sell their businesses and move south.

Despite the mill closings, most of the mill villages remained active until well after the Second World War. Village pride ran high, each remaining staunchly independent with their own fire companies, schools and sports teams.

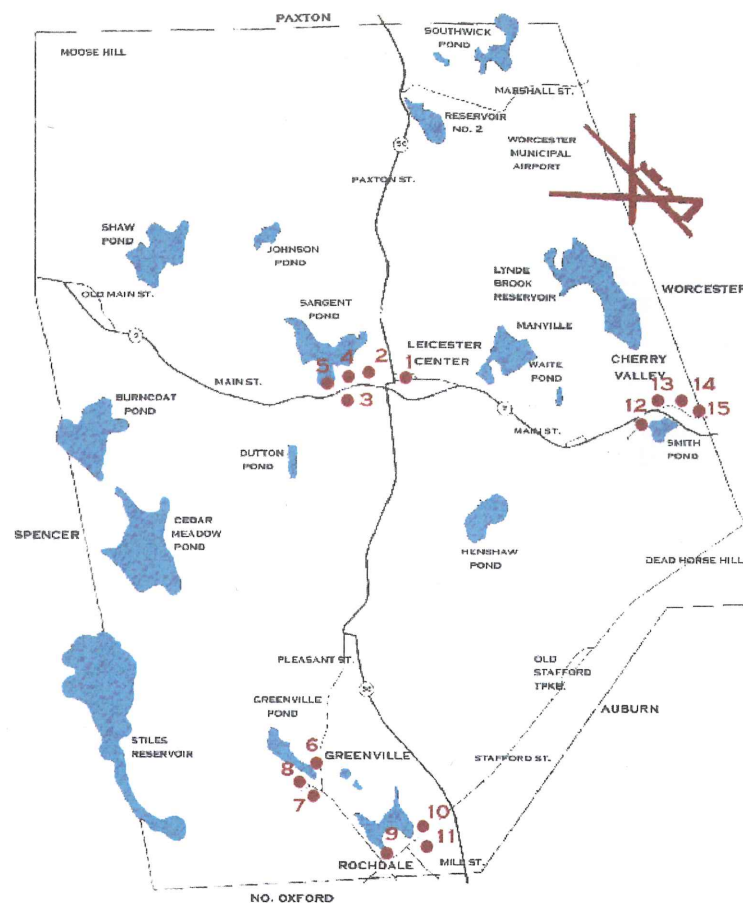
The end of Leicester's textile industry came in 1991 with the closing of Worcester Spinning & Finishing in Cherry Valley, and although the industry itself is gone, there are constant reminders of Leicester's industrial contribution in the form of mills and housing.

These are the legacies of Leicester's storied past.



**A NORTH VIEW OF
LEICESTER'S COMMON**

DIRECTIONS



The Leicester Historical Commission is an agency of local government dedicated to the preservation and education of Leicester's historical assets.

This brochure was developed under the direction of the Leicester Historical Commission with support from the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority under its Massachusetts Turnpike Authority Tourism Grant Program, with assistance from the Leicester Planning Board and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission.

Written by Joseph Lennerton III, Leicester Historical Commission with photography by Jason Grimshaw, Leicester Historical Commission. Designed by Linda Colby, Business Technology Department, Leicester High School.

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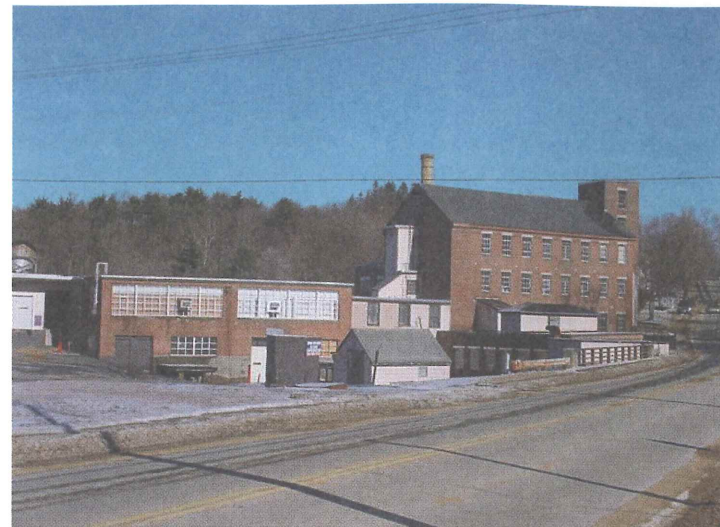
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LEICESTER, MA

The town of Leicester, for the majority of its visitors and residents, appears to be a town that throughout its history has remained largely rural and agricultural. However, a closer look at the community reveals Leicester's industrial past and its prominence in important historical events.

Purchased in 1686 by a group of businessmen from Roxbury, Leicester was settled and incorporated in February of 1713. The town was first called Towtaid, which was the name given by the Nipmuc group that had sold the land. Later it became Strawberry Hill since wild strawberries grew in great quantity. The name Leicester was finally settled upon because Leicester, England was where the father of the first selectman, Samuel Green, had originated.

During the Revolutionary War, Leicester's standing militia company and its company of minutemen marched to Lexington and Concord to aid in the defeat of the British regulars. The term "minuteman" itself has its origins in Leicester. At a meeting of the Committee of Safety in 1774, Colonel William Henshaw of Leicester first suggested its use when he stated, "we must have companies of men ready to march upon a minute's notice."

The town of Leicester is a community that epitomizes the farm to factory movement, which occurred in the early part of the industrial revolution. The area was abundant with small rivers and streams feeding into both the Blackstone and Quinebaug River Valleys. The abundance of water allowed numerous grist, fulling, and saw mills to be constructed.

During the mid 1780's, Leicester began to focus on the manufacture of hand cards, tools used in the making of cloth. When Samuel Slater was building his Pawtucket Mill, he could not get his carding machine to operate. He then began to work with Pliny Earle of Leicester who was engaged in the production of hand cards and known locally as a mechanical "tinkerer." Earle built Slater's carding machine, and Slater's Mill began its production, signaling the beginning of America's Industrial Revolution.

By the time of the Civil War, Leicester was an active and vibrant place. There were carding and textile mills operating in the villages of Leicester Center, Greenville, Cherry Valley, and Rochdale. Thus, when war broke out between the states, those who made a living from the mills did not want to see their liveli-