

A TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE TO
THE HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHIC AND
NATURAL HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF
**PLAINFIELD,
MASSACHUSETTS**

By Lori Austin
April 1998

INTRODUCTION

This resource guide is the culmination of sources I have gathered together for a Teaching Local History course offered at Smith College, taken in the Spring of 1998. It is my hope that this guide, which brings together the cultural, historical, geographic and condensed genealogical history of the small, but historical rich, rural town of Plainfield, Massachusetts, will be used by local educators and historians alike. Although this project was originally formatted to be a useful tool for teachers and students at our local elementary and middle schools, Sanderson Academy and Mohawk Regional Middle School, it has become clear to me that this information may also be used as a resource to parents, scout leaders, child care providers, basically anyone who wishes to bring history to life. All too often, when we are taught history we can feel somewhat disconnected, removed from the places and cultures of the people from the past. Through the teaching of local history as a tool to enlighten children to the rich cultural history that surrounds them I hope that children will not only remember the stories of our past but delight in the discoveries of their own futures. "Search as we might in the history book lives of others we don't know and never have known, sooner or later we will return to find that the answers to who we are and where we've been are nearby..." D. Weitzman.

Surely the best way to truly learn and understand history is to listen to the voices of those that have lived it, voices that tell children the stories of how things use to be. Individual experiences are the very fabric that make up American history. As teachers it is our job to show children that history is really one long interesting and diverse story. The "story" of Plainfield is indeed a rich, relevant story. Just as in any good story there is

a cast of characters, plots and sub-plots, changing scenery, dialogue and many great tales of the trials and tribulations of war, peace, economic hardship and times of plenty, success, failure, birth, death and the realization of community.

Some may ask why is it important to teach local history?, better to teach children the tools they will need for the future. I don't believe children can have a successful future without a deep understanding of the past, they are both intrinsically connected on one long historical time line. Children need to be taught a historical perspective to have the understanding and respect for life, nature and the open-mindedness to diversity it will take to thrive in the next millennium.

This guide was put together to help teachers "plug in" local history into the regular American history curriculum. When teaching children Civil War history why not add some facts about what those times were like for local residents. Let them read letters from local soldiers from the field. Let them see for themselves who the soldiers were, how they dressed, how they felt about the issues leading up to and surrounding the war, what they were writing back to their family members in Plainfield. Teach children that Civil War veterans aren't just some old, funny looking men who lived long time ago but rather show them they were ordinary people, not unlike themselves, some no more older than children, who may have lived in the house next door, who worked in a local mill, read books that you can still take out at the local library, played in the same fields that we play ball in today and are buried in the cemetery we all visit on Memorial Day. Bring these people back to life for the children. Encourage children to write their own stories expressing opinions about slavery and war and let them draw their own conclusions about John Brown's infamous attack on Harper's Ferry, after all, Brown did receive

some of his schooling right here in Plainfield.

Let children read poems written by Plainfield's own William Cullen Bryant, poems inspired by the rolling hills and lush woodlands that surround us and have them write their own poems expressing how this landscape may inspire them.

While studying colonial times or the Industrial Revolution bring into the discussion the way these periods in American history effected Plainfield residents. Use local examples when discussing a unit on geology, glaciers or dinosaurs. Give a child a tape recorder to personally interview a local veteran from WWII. The possibilities seem endless.

The research and resources that follow, and let me assure you it is only a small example of what is available with a little detective work, was gathered and condensed for the purpose of inspiring teachers to seriously consider local history as a fundamental tool in teaching children American history. With any luck and more investigating I hope to periodically update this guide as more primary sources become available.

PLAINFIELD
HAMPSHIRE COUNTY

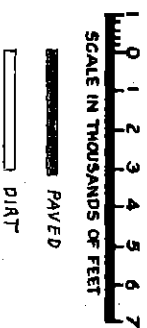
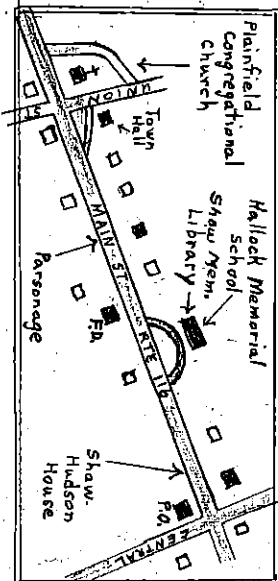
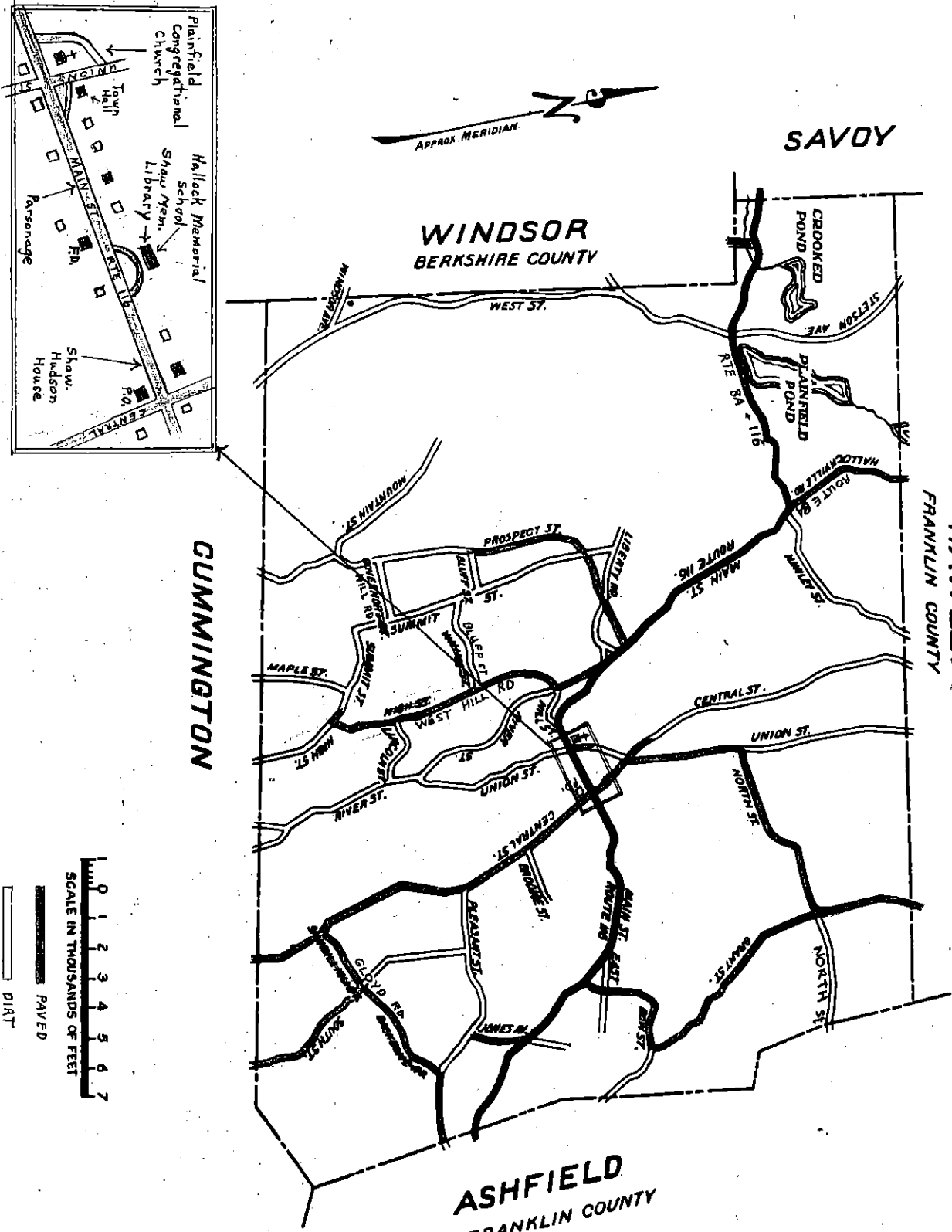
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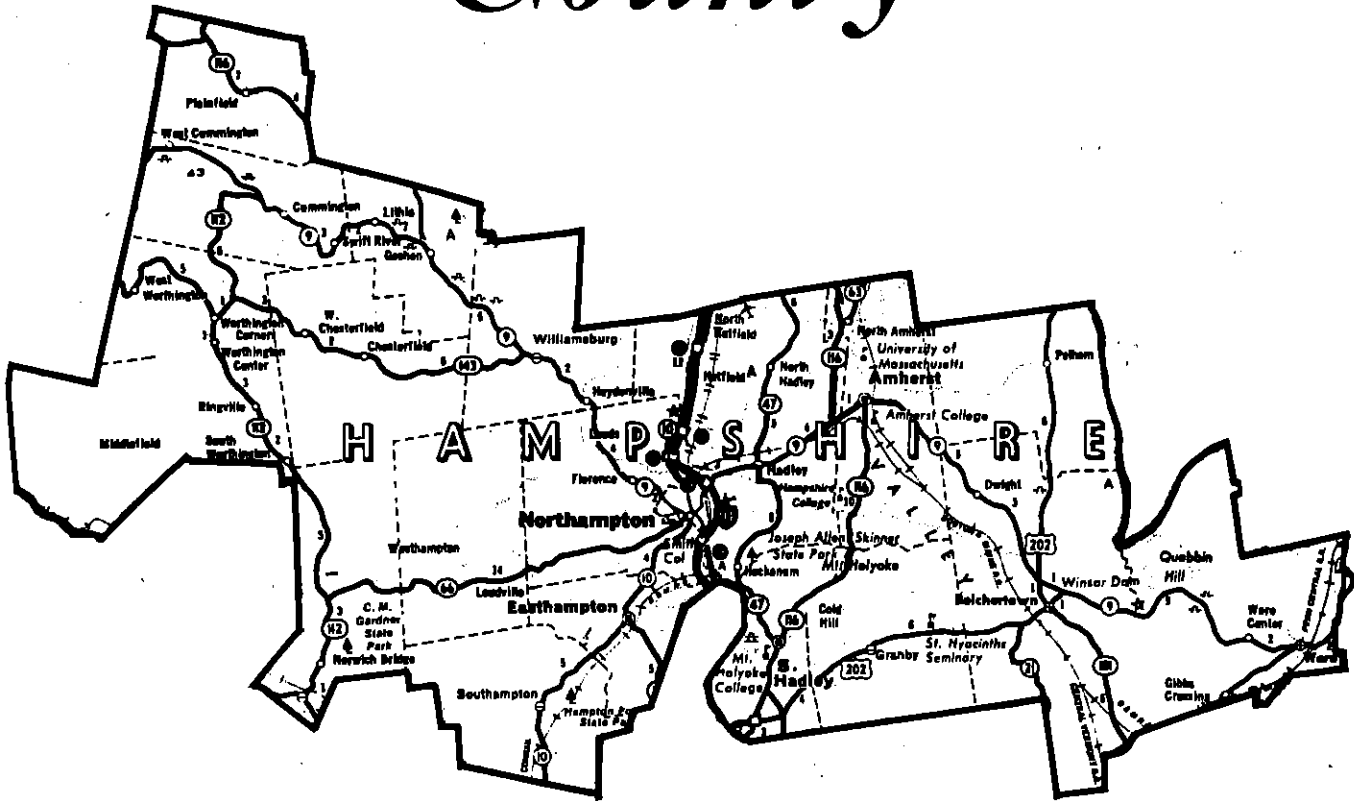
CUMMINGTON



21.4 SQ. MI.

PLAINFIELD

Hampshire County



trips & Trivia

PLAINFIELD, Massachusetts

Population: 287

Zip Code: 01070

A small farming community in the northwestern corner of the county, Plainfield is well known for its wild blueberries and is popular as a spot for antiquers and rock hunters. It has the lowest population in Hampshire County.

Trips and trivia:

- **Berkshire Green Acres** off Route 116 is a recreation spot featuring picnicking, swimming, fishing, hiking trails, and camping. **Plainfield Pond** is a popular fishing spot, and there are several trout streams throughout the town.
- The town's most interesting buildings are clustered around **Plainfield Center**, including the Plainfield Congregational Church of 1846, the Plainfield Town Hall (1847), and nearby houses. Also located in the town center, at the corner of Main and Central Streets, is the **Shaw-Hudson House** (1833), built by Samuel Shaw. The house contains the office of a doctor who was married to William Cullen Bryant's sister; Dr. Shaw's 19th century office has been preserved intact, complete with antique furnishings. Left in trust to the Plainfield Congregational Church, the house operates as a museum that is open to the public May through October at a slight admission fee.
- The **Town Library** was previously the Moses Hallock School, named for the town's first pastor who kept the school in his home. Educated there were such famous students as poet William Cullen Bryant and radical abolitionist John Brown.

- Plainfield commemorates the birthplace of author **Charles Dudley Warner** on Union Street. Warner's *On Being a Boy* captures his Plainfield youth, and his poem *The Mountain Miller* deals with the ruins of the mill of Joseph Beals.

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Tips + Trivia
by
Linda K. Fuller

