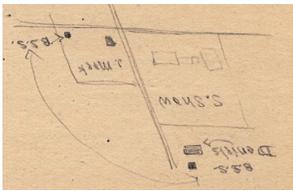


# THE PLAINFIELD AQUADUCT COMPANY: A SHORT HISTORY

On October 18, 1816, the Plainfield Aqueduct Company (PAC) was organized by Dr. Barney Torrey, John Mack, Josiah Shaw 3d, Lt. Levi Cook, and Dr. Jacob Porter, all of whom lived in the center of Plainfield, to harness one of the many springs bubbling up on Ebenezer Nash's land, and share the burden of maintaining a water supply system. The Plainfield "Common" – the land at the NE corner of 116 and Central streets, was getting pretty crowded. John Mack had a house and was getting ready to build a store, Levi Cook did or was about to have a blacksmith's shop, and ditto William Daniels. In such close quarters, it was tough to get enough water for industry and commerce out of shallow, hand-dug wells. Not to mention the issue of privies. Running water from up the hill was a ticket to success. Initially, the water ran in "water logs" to "pen stocks" (wooden pipe); later iron, lead, and plastic pipes were buried. It was brought down through the fields to Central Street, whence it supplied, at minimum, 12 and 4 N Central, the Brick Corner Store with public cistern, 276 Main, the Shaw-Hudson House (1833), and 2 South Central (the Post Office). Soon, it would also be diverted to the Rev. Kimball at 296 Main and the Rev. Moses Hallock next door (burned 1916). The spring was not strong enough for the water needs of the twentieth century. In 1925, the Hallock Memorial School was admitted to the Company, and the search was on for a pump. Richard Nye sold the company an additional spring, about 100 feet southwest of the first, for \$100 in 1941. Locks went onto what had become a spring-house and the school drilled an artesian well (the kind almost everyone now has). Despite periodic shortages and continuous equipment troubles, the Company delivered water until the spring 1971, when a plow broke the main pipe. It was almost rusted shut anyway. The many "rights of way" for PAC pipes, along with those for other springs and for the high tension wires, are still in existence, making the center of town in Plainfield – peaceful, even sleepy as it may appear – a tangled web of rights of way for utilities, encouraging cooperation as well as wont to cause conflict among the town's inhabitants.



*Drawings of transactions in the center of Plainfield, by Priscilla C. Allen on the back of her deed notecards.*



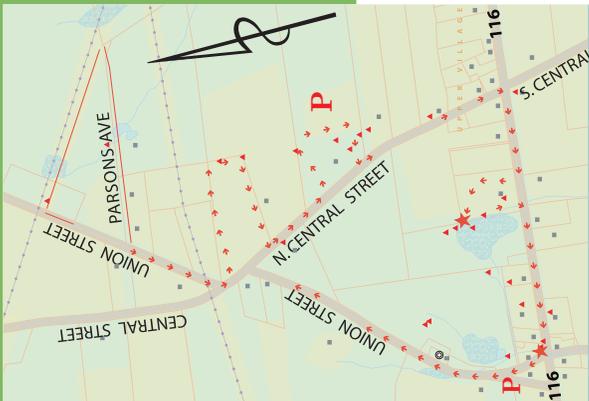
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EASY TO MODERATE 2-2.5 MI WALK  
AGE 12 WITH ADULT TO ADULT



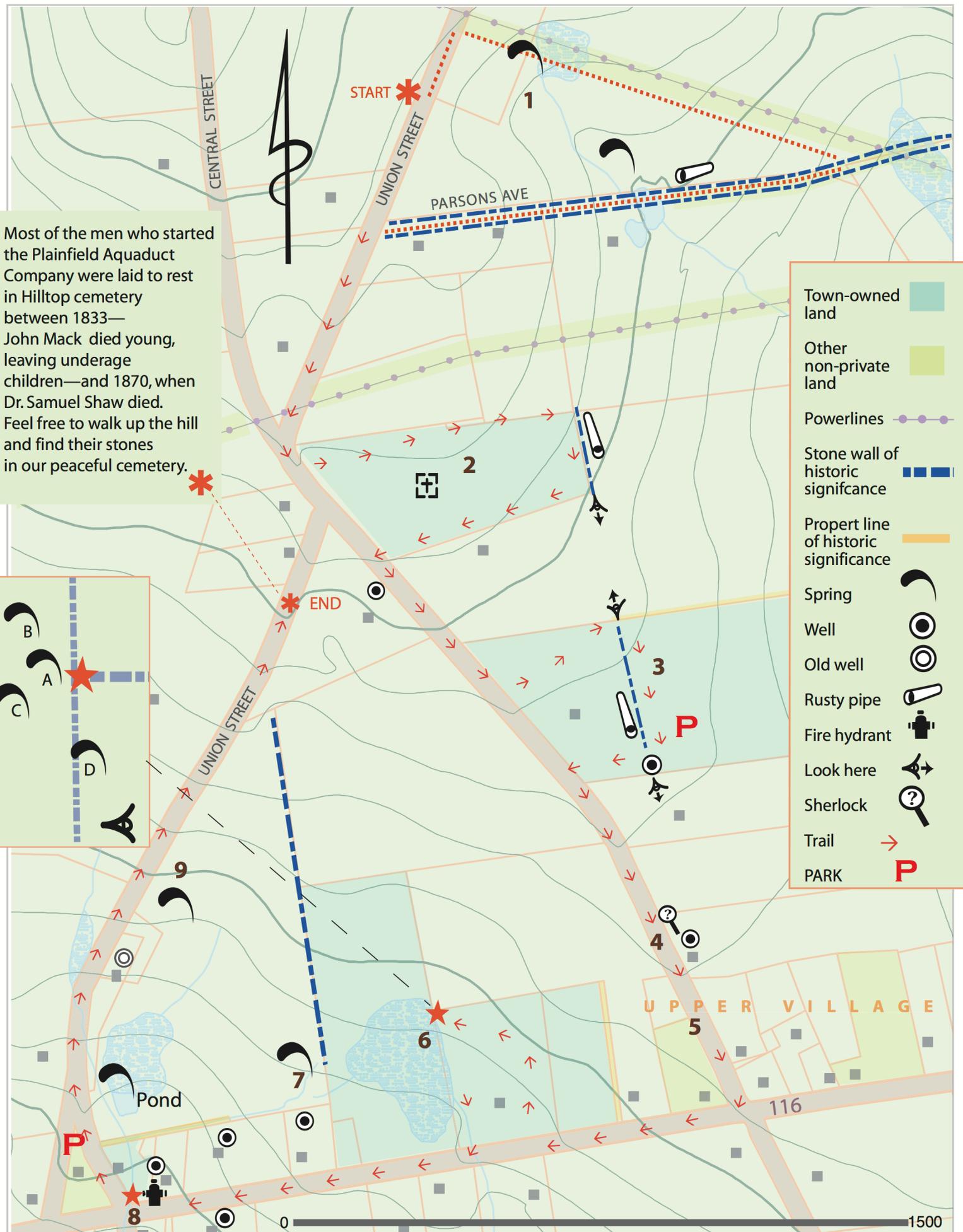
## PLAINFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY HIDDEN WALLS, HIDDEN MILLS EXPLORING THE PLAINFIELD LANDSCAPE PLAINFIELD AQUADUCT COMPANY 1816-1971

### READING THE LANDSCAPE

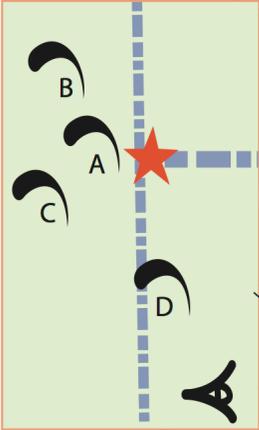
Not all stone walls are created equal. Some are mere piles of stones, some like the walls surrounding Hilltop Cemetery and the Shaw Hudson House - are beautiful, even, double-stacked works of art. These are likely to be newer, since farmers would have piled up any stones just to get rid of them at the edge of one's property (at first), or to form a base for a fence to keep sheep. Some walls in Plainfield still run on the old grid of the Hatfield Equivalent Grant, surveyed in 1744 and laid out almost exactly on a North-South axis (2 degrees W. of N.). It formed the heart of the Plainfield part of Town of Cummington (surveyed much later in 1762 on a NE-SW axis). If you encounter such a wall, it is likely that it has been there for a very long time. Some of them are marked on the map. Older rights of way for water use - of which there are many in Plainfield, tend to follow natural or man-made boundaries in the landscape. It's much easier to run and maintain a water pipe along a stone wall than across a field. Note that a plow finally undid the PAC water "main." Modern wells have often been drilled where the house pipe intersected the PAC pipe. Trees whisper tales: if you try to decide where an access trail or a water pipe once ran, a large tree can tell you on which side of the wall it may have. Those very large maples are close to 200 years old.

### IT'S THE LAW

The early inhabitants of Plainfield did not know that privies contaminate wells and cause disease. (Louis Pasteur read his paper on germ theory to the French Academy of Sciences on April 29th, 1878. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis\\_Pasteur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Pasteur)) Nevertheless, the proprietors of the Plainfield Aqueduct Company seem to have appreciated the virtues of plenty of clean water. For one thing, shallow wells close together take each other's water. As a whole, building houses close together is a bit of a problem when water doesn't get brought in by pipe and waste doesn't get taken away by another pipe. Massachusetts regulates the disposal of waste water - Title V of the State Environmental Code - 810CMR15, [Disposal Systems](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dep-water-laws-tlmn-z-pwellgd.pdf) - much more tightly than private wells or springs ([mass.gov/eca/docs/dep/water-laws-tlmn-z-pwellgd.pdf](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dep-water-laws-tlmn-z-pwellgd.pdf)) and each house sale requires "proof of potable water." MGL C 111, Sect 27A leaves it to each town's Board of Health, if it so chooses, to adopt standards other than the state. Generally speaking, it's a matter of what came first, but the separation between a leach field and a well has to be at least 100 feet, sometimes 150 if the well is downhill, and the separation between wells, 50. It all depends on who's in charge in which town on what day.



Most of the men who started the Plainfield Aquaduct Company were laid to rest in Hilltop cemetery between 1833— John Mack died young, leaving underage children—and 1870, when Dr. Samuel Shaw died. Feel free to walk up the hill and find their stones in our peaceful cemetery.



- 1 ☾ The springs of the Plainfield Aquaduct Company are on the (private) triangle of land between Parsons Ave and the high-tension lines. Parsons Ave dies on a power company right of way used extensively by a snowmobile club.
  - 2 🔍 The pipe ran along the back wall of Hilltop Cemetery. Any guess on which side?
  - 3 🏹 L. below the firehouse leach field retaining wall to the stone wall more or less parallel to the road. Behind the wall is a depression – where the pipe ran, says Ed Morann, who dug it up. Look at the cemetery from the end of the wall. Turn around and follow the wall to the other end. 🏹 Dip in the wall, wellhead, down the field.
  - 4 🕒 Why is this wellhead right here? 🔍 (Check the map)
  - 5 **UPPER VILLAGE** -These houses were supplied by the Plainfield Aquaduct Company:
    - 12 N. Central [1812]-Dr. Jacob Porter. It is likely the pipe split here - with one arm of the Y crossing the road, and the other (possibly) turning East and South to the houses on the Common (268 to 278 E. Main.)
    - 4 N. Central [1804] - "Barn" is possibly Daniels' blacksmith's shop - moved across the street. A Penstock ran to Daniels' in 1817. • 286 Main - Shaw Hudson House (1833) Dr. Samuel Shaw was elected to the PAC board in 1826, when he still lived at 4 N. Central. • 278 Main-Brick house on the corner. John Mack, ca.1820. The store had a large cistern to the side. Its 1 Acre lot was often identified as "The Common, so-called".
  - 2 S. Central [1789/1875] Pond in back supplied by PAC. Bill and Geanna Carver, who lived here, own the PAC springs. • 296 Main- built in 1831 for Rev. David Kimball, who joined PAC in 1831. Between this lot and the school (Moses Hallock's house lot) is a very narrow lot, just wide enough for running a pipe. • 304 Main [1792-1916] Moses Hallock's house and missionary school was here.
  - 6 ★ Take a side trip to see some springs. Across the stone wall - at the intersection - there's a spring bubbling up ☾A, a primitive spring box-☾ B and a more recent one ☾C. Come back across, walk down the wall, pass another ☾D. The "storm" drain at the Library always runs. Plainfield Springs?
  - 7 ☾The spring behind the old parsonage supplied all the houses between it and the Town Hall-and the Town Hall. How could we know?
  - 8 ★ Cover of public water switching - the old Town Hall spring supplied 343-47 Main.
  - 9 ☾ The new Town Hall spring is on private land - please respect the new owner's request that it not be looked for. When the pipe was replaced it ran at 65 gallons per minute - no power needed. Ed Morann laid the pipe "with the deed in my pocket," but the land was since sold.
- A spring is not an undiluted joy: it needs to be fenced off to keep it from being contaminated; where the pipe runs, the plow probably should not; and use of chemicals is a no-no.