

LET'S PRESERVE HOLDEN'S HERITAGE

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Holden, Massachusetts

A REPORT OF THE HOLDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND

In May of 1960, the Historic District Act, Chapter 40C of the General Laws of Massachusetts was adopted. With this act, it is possible for communities in the Commonwealth to establish historic districts. The purpose of these districts is to protect and preserve within a city or town such area or areas which are either historically significant to the town, city or state or which have those distinctive characteristics in the architecture of its buildings and their relationship to each other and their setting which can be a pocket reminder of the past.

Historians have long realized the need to preserve early structures and areas indicative of cultural and social and economic development. Charleston, South Carolina started the historic district movement in the United States in 1931, followed in 1937 by New Orleans. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the establishment of historic districts is an accepted method of conserving beauty, as well as preserving areas of historic significance. Since then many states have adopted appropriate legislation for the establishment of historic districts.

The first Massachusetts Historic Districts to be created were the Beacon Hill Historic District and the Historic Districts in Nantucket. Since then, Historic Districts have been established in Bedford, Cambridge, Chatham, Harvard, Petersham, Sudbury, Shrewsbury, and many other towns.

In accordance with the provisions of this chapter of the General Laws, the Board of Selectmen of Holden voted to establish a Historic District Study Committee. This committee was appointed in July of 1970 for the purpose of determining if Holden should establish one or more historic districts and to make a report of its findings.

INVENTORY

Although Holden's history goes back in time as far as most towns in the area, many of its antiquities have not been preserved. Because of the lack of sensitivity and of a feeling for history on the part of our predecessors, the town has been robbed of a beauty and an atmosphere that could have been preserved with foresight.

But it is a mistake to confuse history with antiquity. In addition to a very few houses built in the 1700's, there still remain pockets of charm from later periods -- from the middle and late 1800's, and even from earlier in this century -- which lend character and a sense of permanence to our community. These are the antiquities of the future, if only we can learn from the mistakes of the past and can have the foresight to preserve them for those who come after us.

In order to determine and evaluate possible areas of historic significance, early maps and town histories were studied and on-site surveys made. After careful consideration, it was concluded that although Holden does not have an abundance of its early buildings concentrated in a very large area, Holden should establish Historic Districts to preserve two areas of which it can be proud. The Study Committee proposes that one district include the Old Burying Ground and the Hancock Common, together with the Baptist Church, Baptist parsonage, Trowel Club, Town Hall, First Congregational Church and its parsonage, Damon Memorial Building, the land owned by the town on which is located the Damon House and Butler House, and on the opposite side of Main Street the property on which is located the gasoline station. By establishment of these boundaries, the Historic District would encompass the numbered highways as they converge in the center of Holden. The committee proposes that a second district be established which includes properties fronting Boyden Road.

Why these two particular districts? The first area is not in danger of being changed, you may believe, but a widening of Route 31 or 122A in the center of town could seriously detract from the green space setting that enables each building to be viewed individually as well as an area as a whole. A future Historic District could extend outward from this area. The second area with its cluster of charming little old houses, together with the original eighteenth century turnpike atmosphere is unique in Holden. In addition to its being the original main street of the town, this area is of great significance because the dates of the homes here span the greatest number of years of any one street in Holden from late eighteenth century up to 1940.

HOLDEN CENTER

A. OLD BURYING GROUND - The Old Burying Ground was established by deeds of land by Samuel Pierce of Holden in 1758 and Daniel Hinchman of Boston in 1759. The Burying Ground has an area of approximately one and one-third acres and is located directly opposite the Common, having Main Street and Reservoir Street on two of its boundaries.

This cemetery is in good condition and has kept its original character throughout the years. The ground cover is grass- and the land is moderately wooded. Several of the trees were planted by Col. Jarvis Abbott over 100 years ago. The gravestones provide a good sampling of pre- and post-revolutionary design, including some of the death's head type, and many fine examples of the willow design. A chain fence separates the grounds from Main Street, and a stone wall lies between the cemetery and Reservoir Street. This graveyard served the town until 1826 when land was acquired for the Park Avenue Burying Ground a short distance North on Main Street.

B. THE BAPTIST CHURCH AND PARSONAGE - The Baptist Church was first organized in 1807, and worship services were held in homes in various parts of town. The first building was dedicated in 1820 on a lot north of the Damon Memorial. It still stands on the corner of Walnut Street and Highland Street, and was used until the present Baptist Church was dedicated in 1835.

The Church has been remodeled several times, but today it still retains its New England charm with a strong suggestion of the Federal Period in its architecture.

The Baptist Church Parsonage was built in 1848, and has been continuously owned by the church. It is an example of Federal architecture, and its location beside the church typifies a way of life in early nineteenth century New England communities.

C. THE TROWEL CLUB - The large brick three-story eighteenth century dwelling on the corner of Main and Maple Streets was built by Samuel Davis some time before 1800. He served the town as postmaster in 1826 & 1827, and Selectman for five years. In 1875 Amasa Howe opened this building as a hotel called the Central House. He was succeeded in the management of the Central House by three or four others, before it became the property of James C. Allen.

It was used as a Community House for a number of years and since 1922 it has been and is now owned by the Holden Trowel Club.

Its classic beauty and simplicity of design of the Federal period is enhanced by its proximity to the Hancock Common. Its charm contributes to the area as a whole.

D. HANCOCK COMMON AND TOWN HALL - From the original deed signed "on the 25th day June, one thousand, seven hundred and eighty-nine" by John Hancock and properly witnessed, we may read of the boundaries as stated therein. "Beginning at the heap of Stones near the Spot appropriated for the foundation of the Meeting House, thence running Northeast twenty rods on Land of Rev. Joseph Davis to a heap of Stones on the public Road, and thence eight rods on said Road to the first mentioned bound, the aforesaid Land to lay as a Common forever."

The unique origin of Holden's Hancock Common is in itself distinctive, and of great historic interest.

Holden did not have a Town House until the present structure was built in 1836. The Town Hall, according to the early reports, was erected by Martin Harrington at a cost of less than \$4,000.00, was sixty-three feet long including the piazza and thirty-eight feet wide. In 1876 the Hall was made twenty-six feet longer. Today it is an important part of Holden's heritage, having continuously served as the center of town activities, and is a memorial to Holden residents who gave their lives in the Civil War. It is a classic example of Greek Revival architecture.

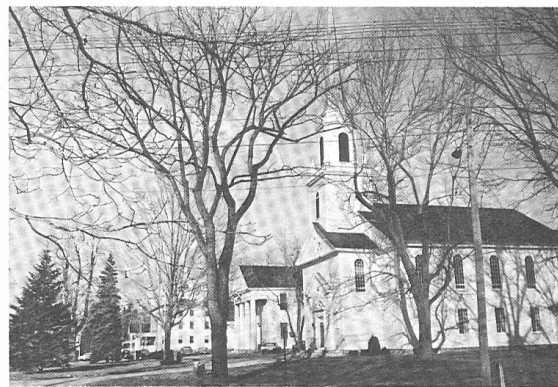
E. "OLD PUBLIC MEETING HOUSE" - AND - CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH. In 1735 James Thompson and sixteen other persons obtained land on which to erect a house for public worship. The present Damon House is now located on this site.

This early building was used from 1737 when it was completed until 1789. The Reverend Joseph Davis was called as first fulltime minister in 1742.

* Correction: Samuel should be Lemuel Davis

The present Congregational Church was built in 1789 in the center of the acre of land which was deeded to the Town in that year by the Hon. John Hancock. The church was moved back about fifty feet in the year 1828 and turned one-quarter of the way around where it stands today. This church has been remodeled and an adjoining parish house has been added. The original part of the building is a modification of Greek Revival in architecture, and the design of later changes is in keeping with this period.

The parsonage at 26 Maple Street, built in 1910 by William Warren, is an example of the Italian influence in architecture of the early twentieth century prevalent throughout the eastern United States at that time. Its location, adjacent to the Trowel Club, the Damon Memorial, and the church, warrants its inclusion in the District.



F. THE DAMON MEMORIAL - The Damon Memorial, a gift to the town by Samuel G. Gale and his wife Susan Damon Gale, was built in 1887. Originally serving as high school and library, it presently houses the Gale Free Library. This Romanesque building is primarily of stone which, along with other materials and labor, was obtained from within the Town. Its design features a tower which houses a bell and Howard clock.

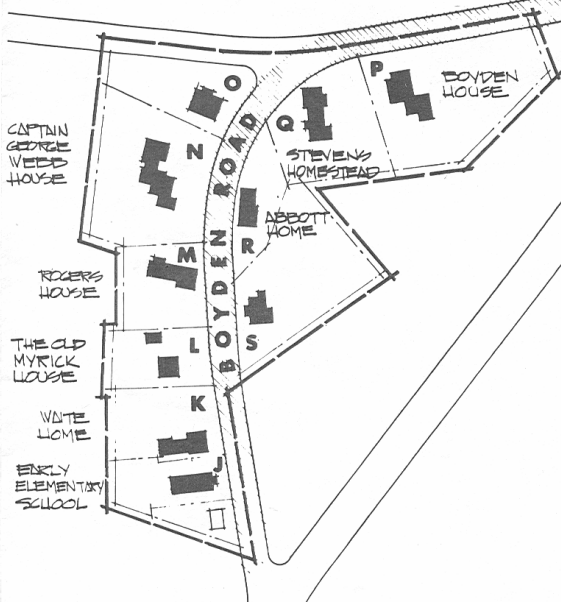
The Damon Memorial derives its historical importance from its service to the Town as school and library and the fact that it memorializes the Damon family. The site of the building is located on land formerly owned by the Chenery family which dates back to 1768 and lies directly opposite the former Damon property.

G. THE DAMON HOUSE - The Damon family is one of the most prominent in the history of the Town. It traces its ancestry to John Damon who emigrated to the Commonwealth in 1633 from Reading, England. The first Damon to live in Holden was Samuel Damon who arrived in 1779. His son, Samuel, was born in 1786. Beginning as a clerk in his father's store, the younger Samuel eventually became owner of several stores and mills in Holden and surrounding towns.

He was active in Town affairs as well as in business, holding at various times most of the more important town offices and serving as legislator for four terms. His marriage to Alony Chenery, daughter of the Town's physician, produced nine children.

Directly after the removal of the first meeting house from its position on the corner of Highland and Main Streets in March, 1791, the original Damon house was built with a store adjoining. The present Damon House was built in 1901 after the first residence was destroyed by fire. This location is of historic importance to Holden because this was the site of the original "Old Meeting House" which is pictured on the Town Seal.

H. ABBOTT TAVERN SITE - Although the fourth corner of Reservoir and Main Streets has been a business site since 1936, this location was the site of the original Abbott Tavern which was built in 1763 and occupied as a tavern for more than 100 years. For this reason the Committee feels it is essential to include this site which has historic significance. The fact that it is located directly opposite the site of the "Old Meeting House" and opposite the Old Burying Ground and diagonally opposite the Congregational Church gives this site added importance. As was stated in the foregoing Inventory and Evaluation, inclusion of this fourth corner would give continuity to the District.



boyden road historic district



BOYDEN ROAD

J. EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - 8 BOYDEN ROAD - This building built in 1854 on the site of the present Junior High School, was in continuous use as a school until 1911 when the Rice School was built. In 1924 it was purchased and moved to its present location by Dr. Frank H. Washburn who converted it into a clinic and office building. It is now an attractive colonial style apartment house.

K. WAITE HOME - 12 BOYDEN ROAD - This home was built in 1820 and is in the style of Greek Revival architecture. It presently houses two apartments.

L. THE OLD MYRICK HOUSE - 20 BOYDEN ROAD - This house was built in 1841. It is colonial style architecture and originally had ell and barn attached. It was and is a one-family home, presently owned by A. Wallace Gove. Former owners included a descendant of the Damon family and George Stone whose wife was a Boyden. The house is surrounded by large shade trees which enhance its charm.

M. ROGERS HOUSE - 28 BOYDEN ROAD - An outstanding feature of this property is that it housed a blacksmith shop in the 1700's. Built in 1722, it became the property of the Rogers family in 1854 where it remained until it was purchased by its present owner, Mrs. Helen Brierly Jamieson. An early owner was Charles Damon. The exterior appearance of the house is essentially unchanged, even to its attached ell shed and barn.

N. CAPTAIN GEORGE WEBB HOUSE - 36 BOYDEN ROAD - Records indicate that this house was built sometime between 1780 and 1798. It belonged to Captain George Webb between 1818 and 1828 when he deeded it to his daughter. The house has original hand-hewn timbers and attached ell and barn. The house is presently owned by Wesley Taylor.

O. 42 BOYDEN ROAD - This is one of the two houses in this area built in the twentieth century. Its simple exterior and charming setting enables it to blend in harmony with the surrounding older buildings. The present owner is Kendall H. Marsh.

P. BOYDEN HOUSE - 61 BOYDEN ROAD - For eight generations this house has been in the possession of descendants of the Boyden family. A store occupied the two front rooms at a very early date when the then-main road to Holden Center from the South passed by the door. This colonial style house was built in 1780. It is presently owned by Dianne Kelton.

Q. STEVENS HOMESTEAD - 51 BOYDEN ROAD - Built as a residence this 1870 home now has two apartments. It has an attached ell and barn. While not distinctive in character, the house retains its original appearance and contributes to the attractiveness of the area.

R. ABBOTT HOME - 35 BOYDEN ROAD - This house was built in 1780 by Captain George Webb and presented to his daughter who married Simon Abbott. It is the only Salt Box style in the area, which gives it great appeal, and lends variety of design. The present owner is Willard Travis.

S. 25 BOYDEN ROAD - This residence, built in 1941, was built in a simple design enabling it to be acceptable in a very old setting. This is the most recent dwelling in this area and completes the span of late eighteenth century to twentieth century of home building that makes this lovely, quaint street so desirable as a Historic District.

BY - LAW

PROPOSED BY-LAW FOR THE TOWN OF HOLDEN ESTABLISHING THE HOLDEN CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT, THE BOYDEN ROAD HISTORIC DISTRICT AND THE HOLDEN HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION

1. NAME - This by-law shall be known and may be referred to as the Holden Historic Districts By-Law.

2. PURPOSE - The purpose of this by-law is to promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the preservation and protection of the distinctive outward appearance and characteristics of buildings and places significant in the history of the Town of Holden or its architecture, through the maintenance and improvement of the appearance and settings for such buildings and places and through the encouragement of design and construction compatible therewith.

3. HISTORIC DISTRICTS - There is hereby established pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 40C of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as amended, (such statute being hereinafter called the "Historic Districts Act") two historic districts to be known, respectively, as the Holden Center Historic District and the Boyden Road Historic District, said districts being shown on a plan that is on file in the Town Clerk's office for the Town of Holden, which plan is entitled "Plan of Holden Center and Boyden Road Historic Districts drawn by Engineering Division, Department of Public Works, Town of Holden, P. N. Anderson, Town Engineer".

4. THE HOLDEN HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION - There is hereby established pursuant to the provisions of the Historic Districts Act an historic district commission which shall be known as and may be referred to as The Holden Historic Districts Commission (hereinafter called the "Commission").

5. COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP - The Commission shall consist of seven members appointed by the Board of Selectmen, none of whom need be residents of or owners of property in an historic district to be administered by the Commission. Before making any appointment, the Board of Selectmen shall, in writing, request the names of two nominees from the Holden Historical Society, or the then local historical society, or in the absence thereof, from the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities; two nominees from the Chapter of the American Institute of Architects covering the Town of Holden; and two nominees from the Greater Worcester Board of Realtors, Inc., or the then local board of realtors covering the Town of Holden. If any such organization shall fail to name its two nominees within thirty days of such request, the Board of Selectmen may make the appointment without nomination from such organization. The remaining appointments may be made by the Board of Selectmen without nomination from any organization. When the Commission is first established, two members shall be appointed for a term of one year, two shall be appointed for terms of two years, and three shall be appointed for terms of three years. A successor to a member shall be appointed by the Board of Selectmen in the same manner as such member was appointed, except that his term shall be for three years. If a vacancy on the Commission occurs, it shall be filled for the unexpired term by the Board of Selectmen in the same manner as the vacating member was appointed. Each member shall serve without compensation and shall continue in office after the expiration of his term until his successor is duly appointed and qualified.

6. POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

A. GENERAL POWERS AND DUTIES - The Commission shall have jurisdiction over and shall administer any historic districts that are established by the Town of Holden in accordance with and pursuant to the provisions of the Historic Districts Act. In this connection, the Commission shall have all the powers and perform all of the duties that are conferred and imposed on historic district commissions by the Historic Districts Act and of subsequent amendments thereto and which are not inconsistent with the provisions of this by-law.

B. POWER TO ADOPT RULES AND REGULATIONS - NOTICE - The Commission may adopt and amend such rules and regulations for the conduct of its business that are not inconsistent with the provisions of the Historic Districts Act, this by-law and of subsequent amendments, respectively, thereto. Prior to the adoption of or the amendment to any of such rules or regulations, the Commission shall hold a public hearing for the purpose of considering such proposed rules or regulations or any amendments thereto. Notice of such public hearing

shall include the publishing of a written notice in a newspaper having a general circulation in the Town of Holden at least once a week for two successive weeks, the first publication being made at least fourteen days prior to the date that has been set for such hearing. Such notice shall set forth such proposed rules or regulations or amendments thereto, in their entirety, and shall also state the date, time and place that has been set for such hearing. Such rules and regulations shall be adopted and amended only upon the compliance with any additional notice requirements that may be imposed upon the Commission after the adoption of this by-law by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

C. POWER TO EMPLOY ASSISTANTS, ACCEPT AND EXPEND MONEY - The Commission may, subject to appropriation, employ clerical and technical assistants or consultants and may accept money gifts and expend the same for such purposes.

D. ADDITIONAL POWERS - The Commission shall have such other powers, authority and duties as may be delegated or assigned to it from time to time by vote of a town meeting.

7. SEVERABILITY - In case any section, paragraph or part of this by-law be, for any reason, declared invalid or unconstitutional by any court of last resort, every other section, paragraph, or part shall continue in full force and effect.

HOLDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

Jacques Fauteux, Chairman
Donald Boyce
Michael Brockelman
Charlotte Hammond
Fred Holt
Isabelle Roddenberry
Dr. David Stevens

FORMER MEMBERS

William Langenheim
Eugene Oriol
Nancy Taylor