



THE HERITAGE OF

EASTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS:

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ITS CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Before 1675

Easthampton for centuries prior to settlement was the home of the native Americans. The Pokumtakukes or, Pocumtucks, estimated to have numbered approximately 1,200 to about 1600, were the primary tribe to dominate the Connecticut Valley. During the decades following the white settlement of New England beginning in 1620 numerous diseases were transmitted by the settlers to the Indians, with fatal results. By the time that Northampton was settled in 1654, the population of the Indians in the Connecticut Valley was probably even less than that estimate. The Norwottucks, the local Indian group affiliated with the Pocumtucks, probably used the Connecticut River at the Oxbow and the Manhan River for transportation routes and fishing. A number of Indian trails crossed through the town, some of which were used and ultimately improved by the English settlers. The primary north-south route went from Northampton to Westfield and was supposedly used by the original settlers of Northampton in 1654. This trail may have been the present day streets of Florence-Northampton-Main-Park-Line, which formed a rather direct route south to Westfield, then called Waranoake. Other likely trails followed along the western base of Mt. Tom along East and Hendrick streets, with east-west trails connecting these primary routes. The primary use of the land would have been for small scale farming in the alluvial soil, and fishing, particularly at the confluence of the Manhan River and at the falls near the junction of the Manhan River and Route 10. Fishing encampments along the rivers, as well as possible sites along the Mt. Tom base represented the primary probable Indian sites for the community.

The original Northampton grant included all of the town of Easthampton. For at least the first decade of that town's settlement, there was probably no utilization of the land or resources within the community now known as Easthampton. For this reason, the town meeting at Northampton gave permission to one small band of Indians to establish a palisaded village in Easthampton. Rev. Solomon Stoddard of Northampton wrote in 1815: "This fort is said to have been built on the northerly end of Fort Plain, which is now Easthampton." Fort Plain and Fort Hill Road are terms still used in' probable reference to this old Indian fort, although other sources list it as having been lo-

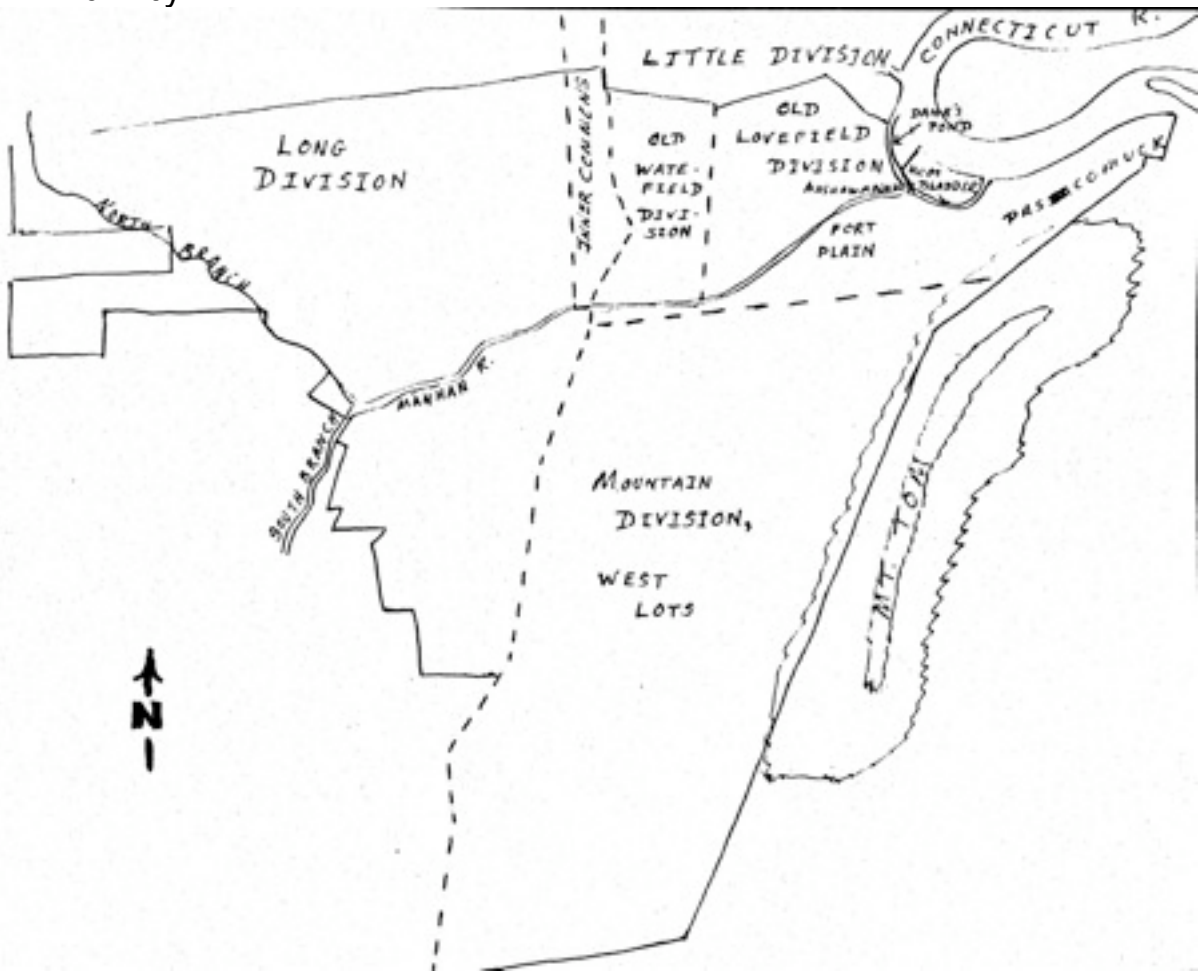
cated southwest of the junction of Route 10 and the Manhan River on a bluff, and as having been located not in Easthampton whatsoever. Circa 1665 is the supposed date of when the first white man settled within the present bounds of Easthampton, in that section of the town referred to as Nashawannuck, near the 1879 home of Henry Clapp. This would put that site in the vicinity of Clapp street and Old Springfield Road. Other than these two possible areas of occupation, one by Indians, the other by a Northampton man named John Webb, no other man made buildings or structures are identified in the surviving historic records.

1675 to c. 1715

About 1675, the town of Northampton granted land at the Manhan Falls to Joseph Taylor, David Wilton and Medah Pomeroy for the purpose of erecting a sawmill. Between 1686 and 1705 a second mill was erected by Samuel Bartlett for the purpose of grinding corn and wheat. This mill was also located on the Falls. Despite the early presence of these two important colonial industries, no settlement of any verifiable nature occurred in Easthampton until c, 1700, when five families established themselves in the area known as Pacommuck. The 1831 map of Northampton, clearly shows the area as bordering between the Oxbow and the base of Mt. Tom along East Street. An estimated nineteen people living in that fortified area were killed when it was attacked by Indians in 1704. The village was abandoned for a period of approximately ten years, before resettlement occurred.

Settlement was invariably contingent on land availability, and thus a brief discussion of the land grant system is in order.' The Northampton men who had initially settled the town or were otherwise allowed were known as proprietors. Proprietors controlled all of the land in the community, as a body corporate. When there was a need for granting additional land to individuals, they would call a meeting and distribute land, usually based upon one's age, wealth, and status. The Northampton proprietors apparently divided up Easthampton into a number of so-called divisions: a section consisting of the old center of Northampton had a strip of land extending to the Manhan Falls and was

the "Inner Commons", the vicinity east of Florence and Northampton roads was called Waterfield Division, that east of it referred to as the Old Lovefield Division, everything south of Ferry street called the Mountain Division, while the western third was the Long Division. The Inner Commons was undoubtedly granted first, since it included the two previously mentioned mill sites. The Old Lovefield Division was apparently divided up second, thus explaining for the early settlement at pascommuck, with the other divisions subdivided to individual proprietors subsequent. The proprietary division lines correspond with numerous roads, still in use today. Florence, Northampton, Main, Park, Line streets, and Ferry street are most of them. Apparently these boundaries corresponded with already established roads or trails. An infinite amount of research could and should be done to check the Northampton proprietors records (3 volumes at the Registry of Deeds in Northampton, possibly 3 identical volumes & 1 untranscribed volume at the Northampton City Clerk's Office) and reconstruct the proprietary grants in Easthampton to better understand the early settlement pattern of the community.



Not surprisingly, no buildings of this early period have survived. While the general areas can be ascertained, exact house or mill sites are either not currently recorded or rebuilding has occurred on the same site, thus obliterating much important archaeological evidence.

1715-1775

Beginning about 1715, the former village of Pascommuck was rebuilt. The immediate threat of Indian attack had substantially lessened during the ten years. A decade or so later, Joseph Bartlett, who established the first tavern in town, built a home in the present center of Easthampton. With the mills acting as a focal point, settlement radiated out from the center, with residences constructed along the southern portion of Main Street supposedly beginning in the 1740's and 50's, and apparently continuing down present day Pleasant Street, as evidenced by this early house of saltbox form located at the corner of Berkely Street.



Its saltbox or leanto rear is apparently of integral design. Its other features of an end gable leanto, front side of three bays in width,

and center chimney are all typical features of the period c. 1730-1760. A somewhat similar house in style can be seen on Mill Street. Although difficult to date because of numerous alterations and confusing title, it exhibits the same basic saltbox form of the 18th century. If Easthampton was like most communities in the region, most of its Georgian period homes were of symmetrical plan, with



gable roofs and center chimnies. Only the Israel Hendrick house on Hendrick Street still retains that typical scheme, although

it has been altered significantly. Without a doubt the highest style home of the colonial period constructed in Easthampton, at least which survives, is the Seth Janes House facing the green in the town center. Despite its clumsy two story porch across the front and the application of asbestos siding, it still retains its original window and door placement, symmetry, dormers, and gambrel roof, all of which suggest a probable construction date of the 1750's or 1760's.

The accompanying photograph shows the house prior to the siding and porch.



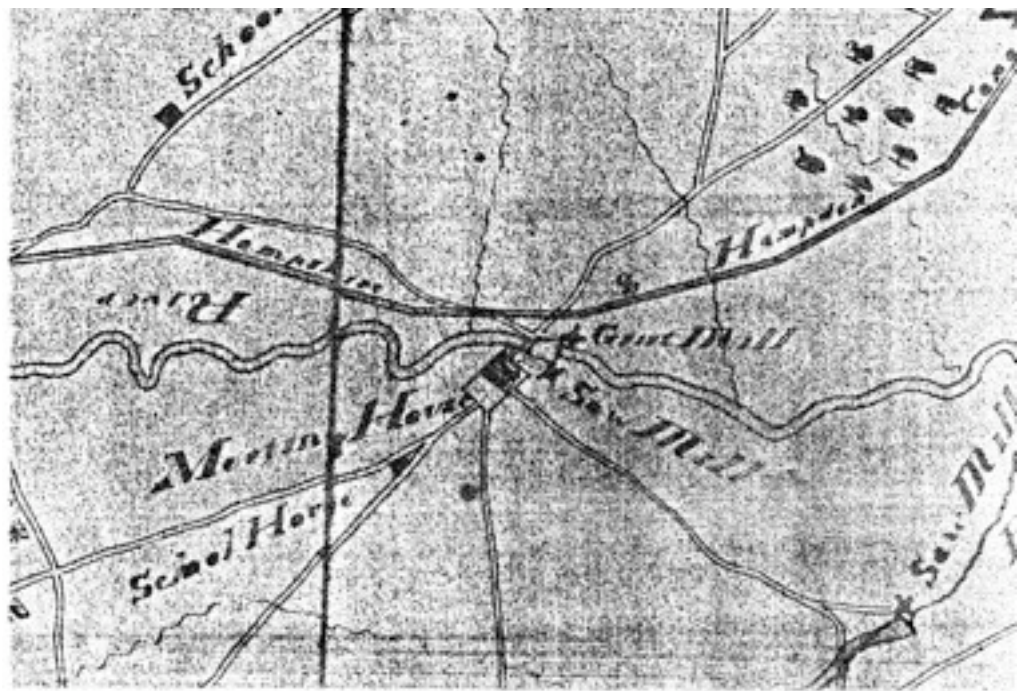
During this period, the residents still had to go to the Northampton Meetinghouse. The distance, combined with an ever growing population created the desire to become a separate town or district and build their own meetinghouse. The outbreak of the American Revolution would back burner any of those thoughts for a while.

As in most towns of the Connecticut Valley, agriculture was the primary economic base, with wheat and flax as the primary crops. Another mill was constructed however, roughly half way between Ferry street and the Manhan River on Broad Brook. Luther Clark and Capt. Lemuel Lyman were responsible for that sawmill being built between 1770 and 1775.

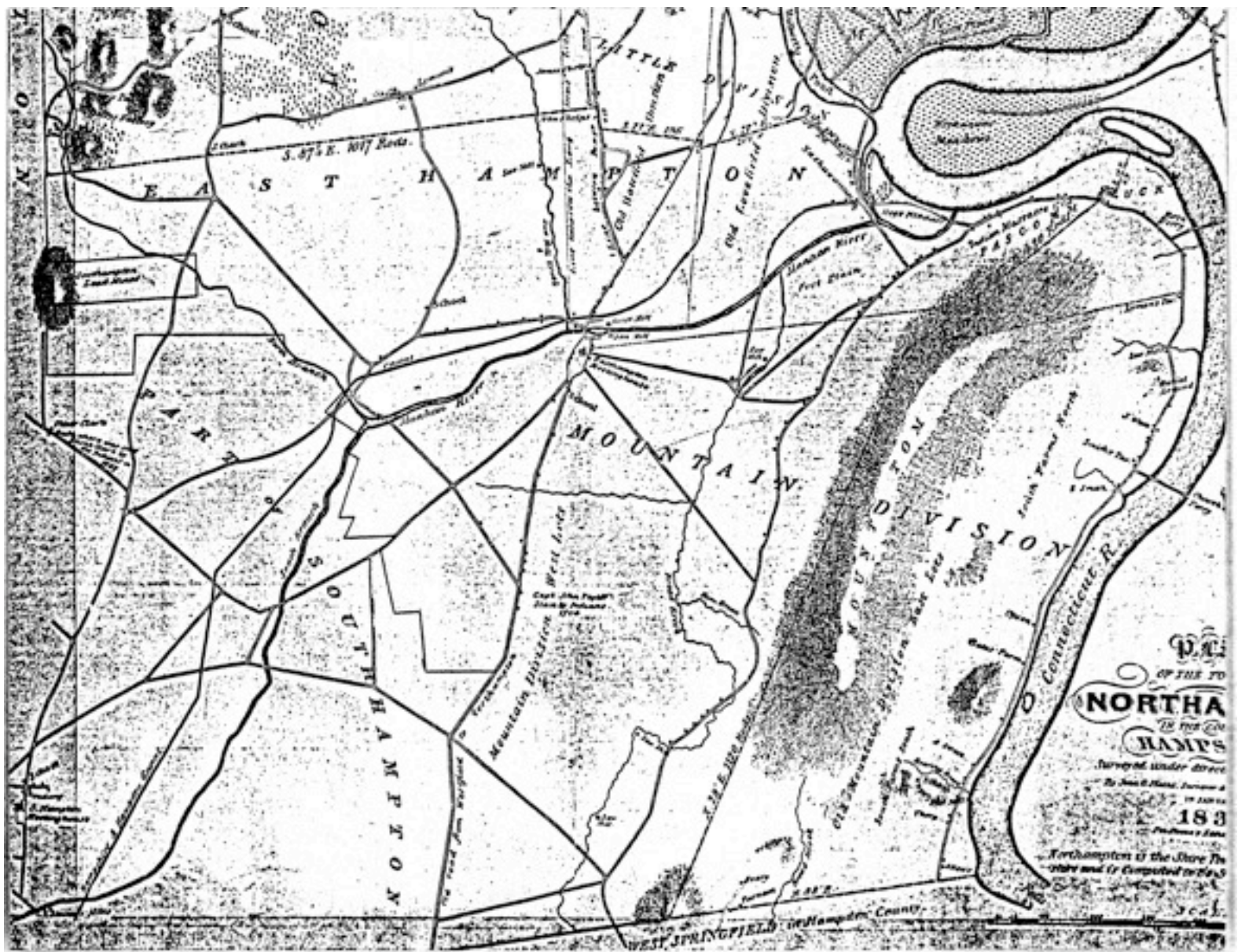
1775-1835

The "Shot hear round the world" may have delayed development in Easthampton and most American communities, but the aftermath brought in a new idealism and grand expectations. By 1785, the district of Easthampton was incorporated from sections of Northampton and Southampton. The town's new meetinghouse, constructed that same year, acted as both a visual, religious and civic focal point for the town. When combined with the importance of the mills and residences in the vicinity, the center of Easthampton was firmly established. While the 1790 map of Easthampton lacks the detail necessary for much interpretation of the town's growth, the 1830 map of Easthampton and 1831 map of Northampton (which delineates Easthampton) gives a great

deal of detail to assist in understanding the growth of the town. Three schools, five sawmills and a grist mill, as well as the Hampshire and Hampden Canal tell of a community that was on the move, slowly but surely prospering. This vitality was exhibited in the form



of more homes to house the growing population. Brick houses are built in Easthampton for the first time, and the typical five.



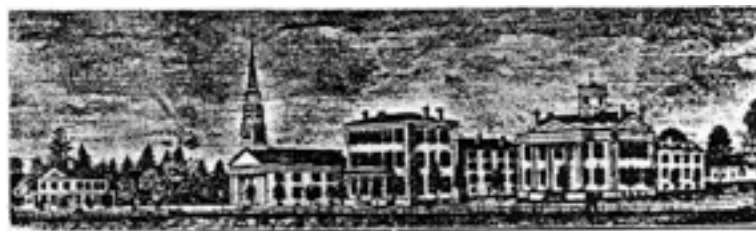
bay wide center hall plan home becomes a norm for construction, although the number of houses from that period which actually survive is somewhat lacking. One of the best, on Clapp street, exhibits a trick of-the-eye in which the fanlight above the front door is actually just wood strips applied to a flush board to imitate the wooden muntin bars of a window.

1835-1870

The period 1835 to 1870 was a period of unequalled growth for the town of Easthampton. The Hampshire and Hampden Canal was in full operation for its entire route from New Haven to Northampton, although its success was shortlived. Subsequent "replacement" with the Westfield and Northampton Railroad in 1856 more than compensated for the canal's loss, at least for transportation purposes.

The single most important factor in the town's future was Samuel Williston. Williston, the son of the town's first minister had a button factory in Williamsburg which he relocated to Easthampton in 1847. His success in manufacturing buttons using special designed machinery resulted in a virtual monopoly of much of the American market and undreamed of wealth. As early as 1841 his wealth from his Williamsburg operations allowed him to open up Williston Seminary.

With the relocation of his button business to Easthampton ushered in extraordinary growth and jobs for residents, individuals from area communities, and ultimately for



Williston Campus 1844 to 1857

immigrants. For much of his business he worked in conjunction with Horatio..G. Knight. The original 1847 button factory still stands. Despite its present appearance, it is without a doubt the single most important industrial building in town because of what it represents. The following year Williston diversified by constructing a suspender factory, called the



Nashawannuck Manufacturing Company. In order to cut down on the costs of procuring the materials for the suspenders, he initiated in 1859 the construction of the Williston Mills to provide cotton yarn, and the first elastic web company in the United states.

He improved the manufacturing process more by relocating the web company beside the Nashawannuck Company, decreasing travel time in essence having an assembly line type operation, with materials and finished product in the immediate vicinity. All of this manufacturing required water power, so by the late 1840's or 1850's he had dammed up the Broad Brook, thus creating Upper Mills Pond and Lower Mills Pond.

All of this business resulted in the need for more workers, housing, and streets. An examination of the 1860 map of Easthampton shows that High, Center, School, Prospect, Knipfer, Chapel, Clark, and part of Pine streets are just some of the ancillary streets built c. 1831-1860. Some of the people who moved to Easthampton included English weavers and Germans. The diversity of housing ranged from plain to grand. The home of Horatio Knight, for example, was a porticoed Greek Revival temple equal to many being built in Northampton and Springfield (far right).



Numerous other more modest homes executed in the so-called Greek Revival mode were of a more modest plan. Typically they were of side hall plan with an off center front door, a gable end which faced the street, and wide corner boards which were accented with mouldings to make them look like large flat columns. As time and styles changed the side hall



plan was adapted to meet those changes. Gothic Revival cottages with arched and gothic arched windows, fascade gables, and occasionally pointed windows were all done on the same basic plan. Other, less





pretentious homes were built along the same lines, but lacked the ornamentation found on their more expensive cousins. Frequently only one and one half stories, they had regular windows, no ornate bay windows, and no abundance of dormers. Other, gothic-like homes were designed on the typical center hall plan, such as the one to the left. While the Greek Revival and Gothic were popular during the period c.1840-1860, the style known as Italianate became a norm for Easthampton and most communities. The number one allusion to Italianate is the use of brackets around the eaves, cornice, rake, porches, anywhere they could be attached. The style was also adapted for both brick residences and commercial blocks.



Beginning c. 1860 and continuing for roughly twenty years, there are numerous examples worthy of pointing out. The wood frame residence, lower left, (the porch is probably c. 1900), and brick home lower right, typify the side hall plan when adapted to the Italianate style.



Commercial blocks designed along this same line typically had' slightly pitched roofs, segmental arched windows, and cast iron surrounds for the store fronts. Instead of wood brackets, the brick was arranged in such a manner at the cornice so as to look almost like teeth from a distance. Some Italianate homes, such as the one below right, were of side hall plan, but were basically square with nearly flat roofs.



The three major companies in Easthampton at that time, the Glendale' Company, Williston Mills, and Nashawannuck Company all had some factory housing by the late 1860's. In general terms, they all had a certain degree of looking like a colonial house usually two stories high, gabled roof, symmetrical window placement. Occasionally they even had the same number of windows and clapboarding like the colonial homes. Usually they can be quickly differentiated from the older residences, because of the proportions and lack of detailing, re: no cornice moulding, brick versus stone foundation, and pitch of roof.

With the increased availability of local brick because of the establishment of a commercial scale brickyard on Clark street in 1864, some mill houses were even executed in brick, as this one on Adams street illustrates

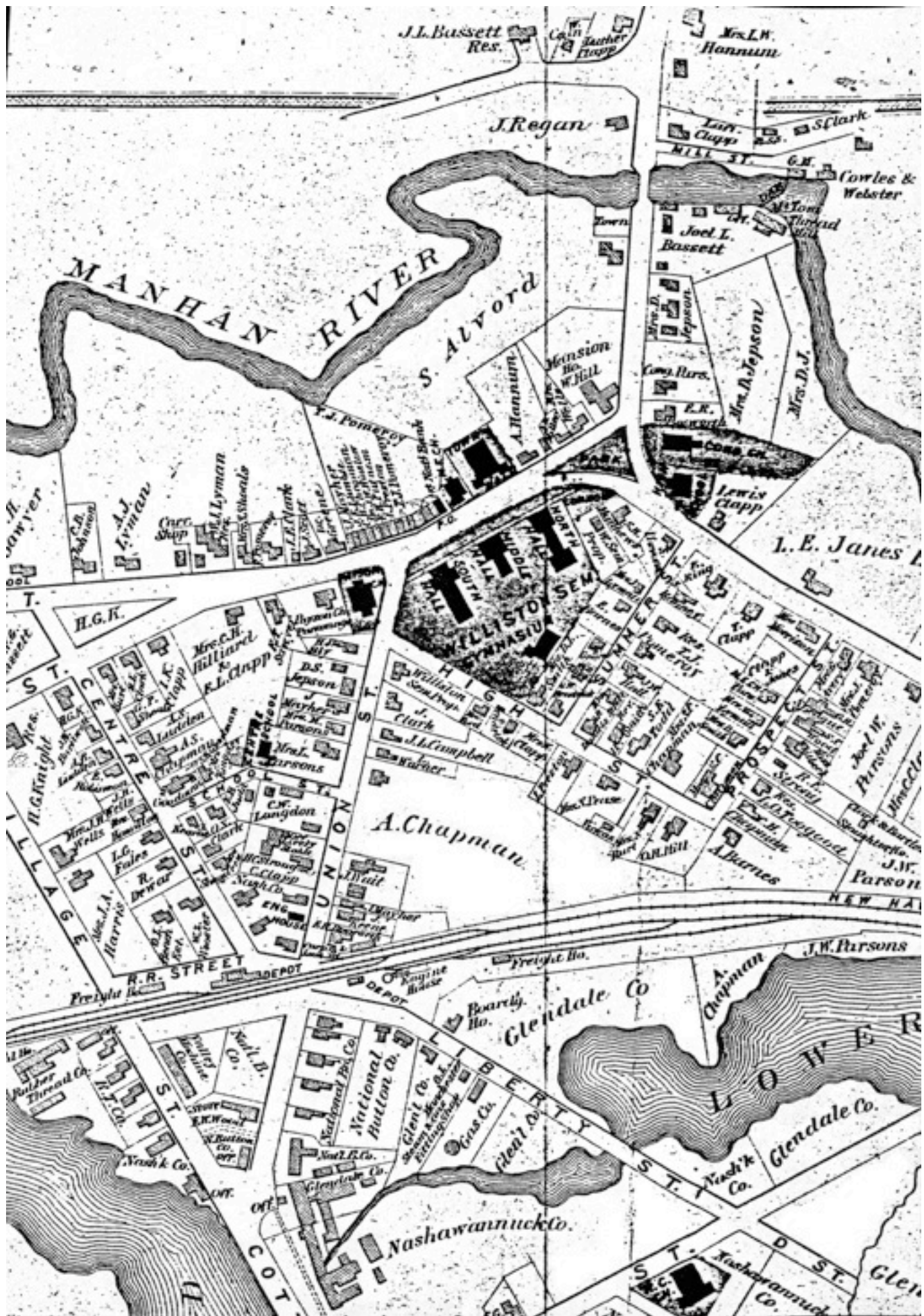


In addition to the residences and factory houses, several key public buildings were also erected which are worthy of architectural merit and consideration. The Memorial Hall, old High School, built during the closing year of the Civil War, and the Payson Church, built between 1852 and 1855, due to two fires, grace the town's center. The High School, of square plan with hip roof, is typical of hundreds built throughout the region during the period. The church is of a colonial-federal design, but embellished with brick corbelled cornice, alluding to a more Romanesque design intent. The Town Hall, designed by Boston architect Charles E. Parker, is one of the finest Victorian town halls in the region. Its polychrome exterior of limestone, longmeadow brownstone, and brick is further graced with stunning stained glass windows, and paired towers. Even its interior second story meeting hall was once painted with ornate polychrome trick-of-the-eye panels on the walls and ceiling, with classic Victorian stencilling. No building in Easthampton occupies a more prominent site or is worthy of the best possible care than this building. The Williston Academy, when located facing the town common, boasted several key buildings. Their demolition leaves a visual void, and represents an extraordinary loss to the town.



THE ACADEMY FROM HIGH STREET, 1865

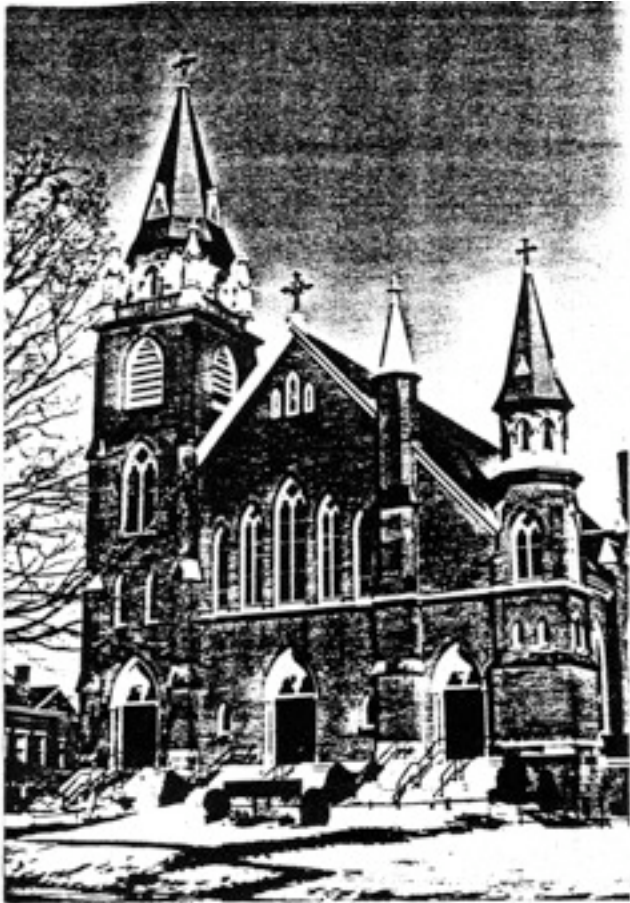






1870-1900

Throughout this period, the community of Easthampton continued an unprecedented growth. The primary businesses of the community increased their annual sales and hiring. The continued growth of the immigrant population, particularly of the Irish, resulted in the puritan town acquiring a decidedly Catholic composition. The result was the erection of three Catholic Churches between 1868 and 1884. The last constructed edifice, the present Immaculate Conception Church, is one of the key Victorian buildings in the community.



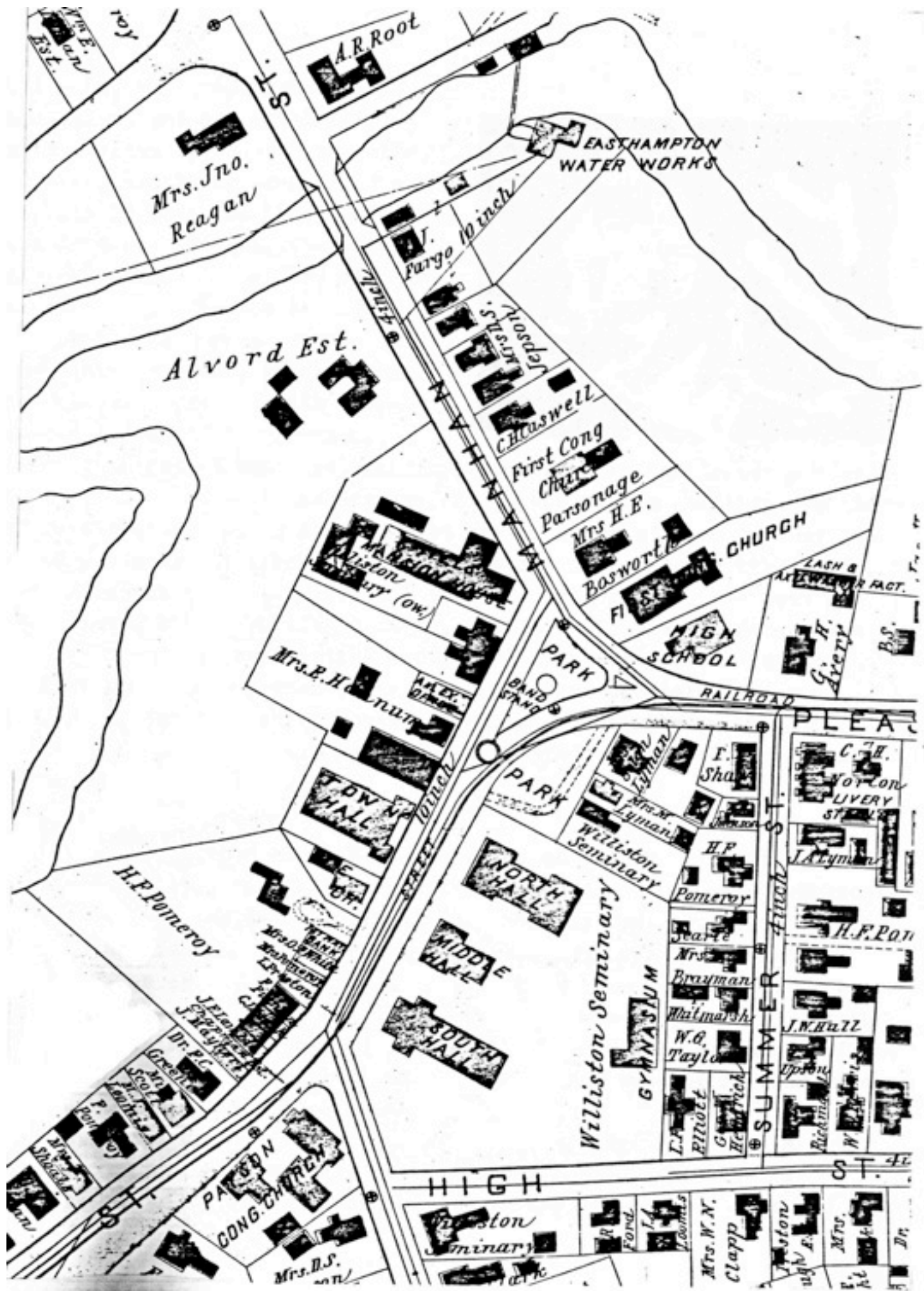
The number of new streets and neighborhoods which "popped up" is astonishing. The majority of construction occurred between Cottage and East streets, primarily aimed at the workers of the various local concerns. Some infill construction was occurring throughout existing neighborhoods. Higher skilled and professionals were principally locating on Main and Park Streets.

The diversity of the town's residents and wealth was exemplified by the various styles represented in the town. Second Empire homes were occasionally built, primarily in the Main street vicinity in the decade following the Civil War. The two preferred styles were the colonial revival and Queen' Anne mode. While many were scaled down from grander examples found in Northampton, some of those built along Main

Street were of exquisite scale and detailing.

The example to the right, on Pleasant street, has a two story curved bay across much of the front. This example is even more interesting when one considers that it had only been within the last year that asbestos siding installed c. 1940(?) has been removed. Other typical examples, such as





this one, have the typical side hall plan, and are embellished with overhangs, projecting gable, porches, ancillary wings, and a variety of textures through the combined use of trim, clapboards and shingles. Others are blessed with towers. The one institutional Queen Anne worthy of note is the Public Library, which combines half-timbered gables with



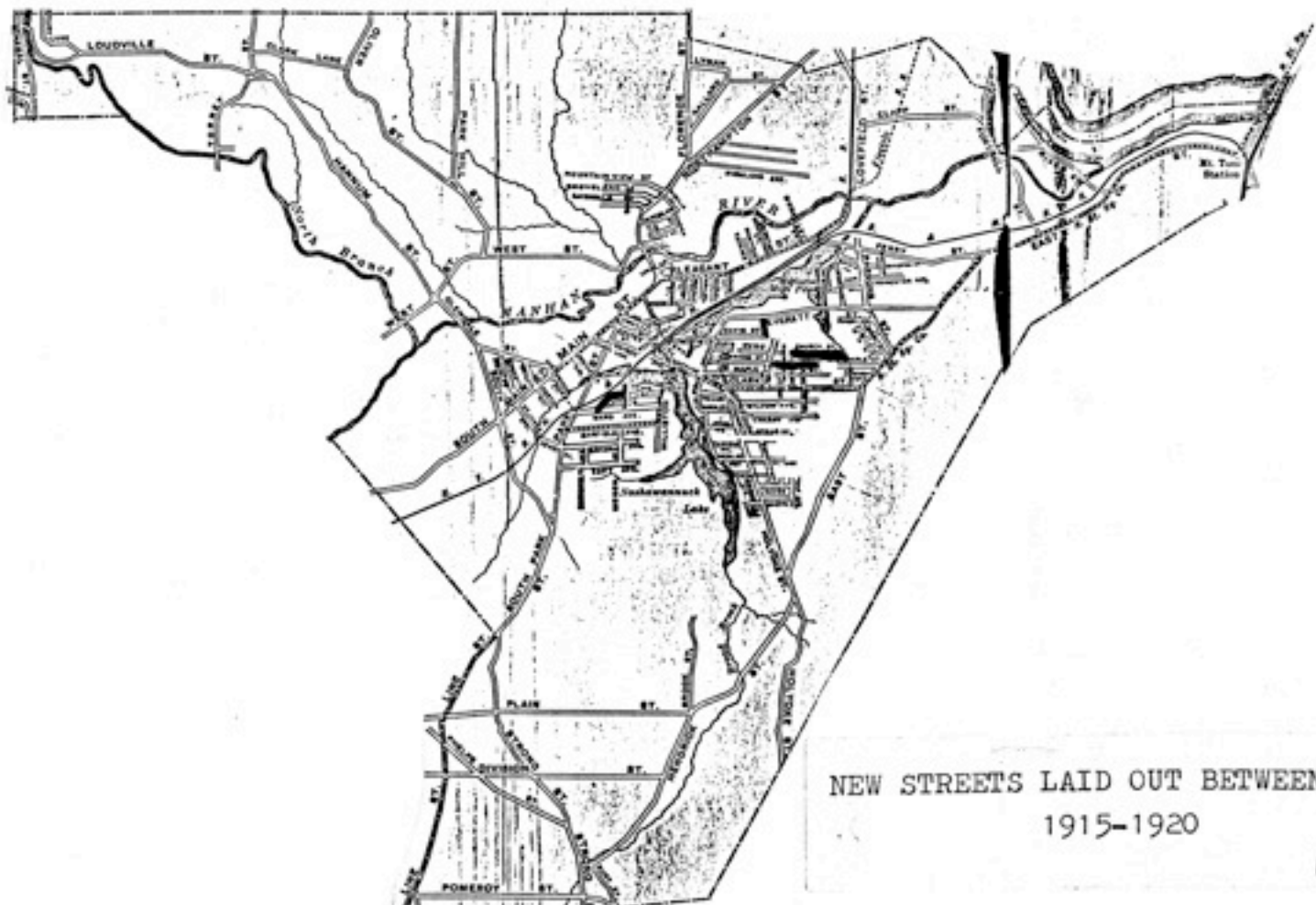
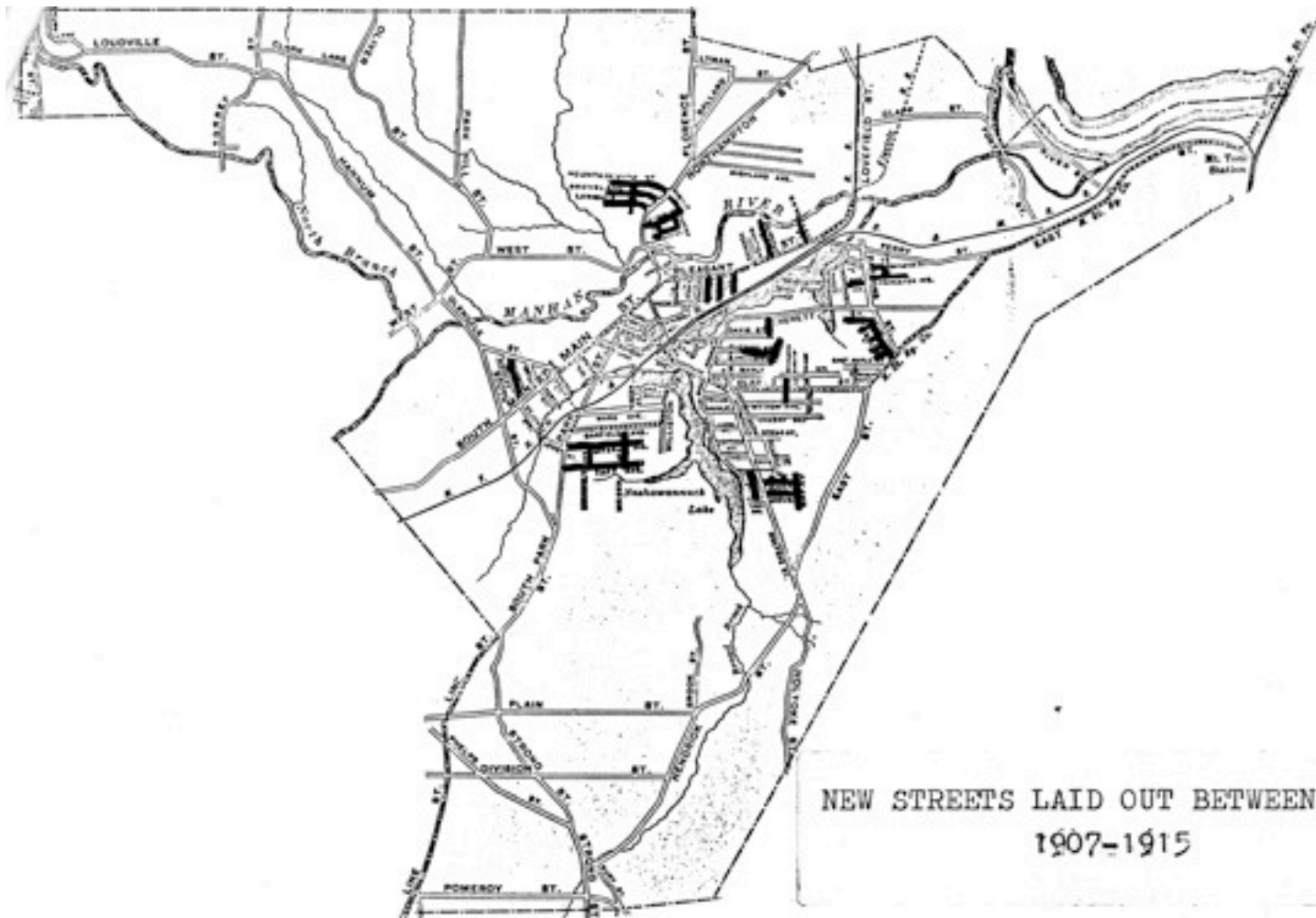
Longmeadow sandstone

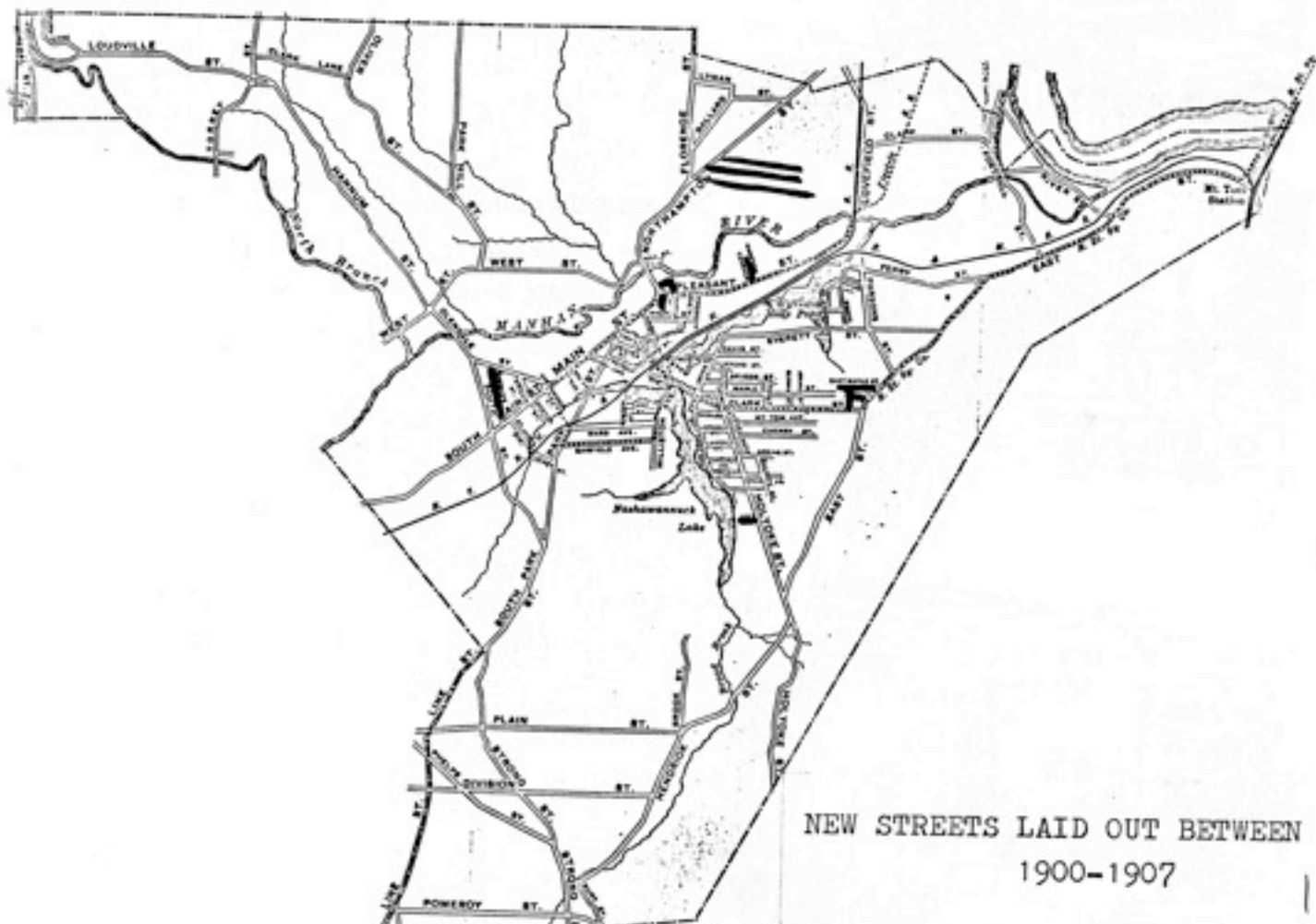
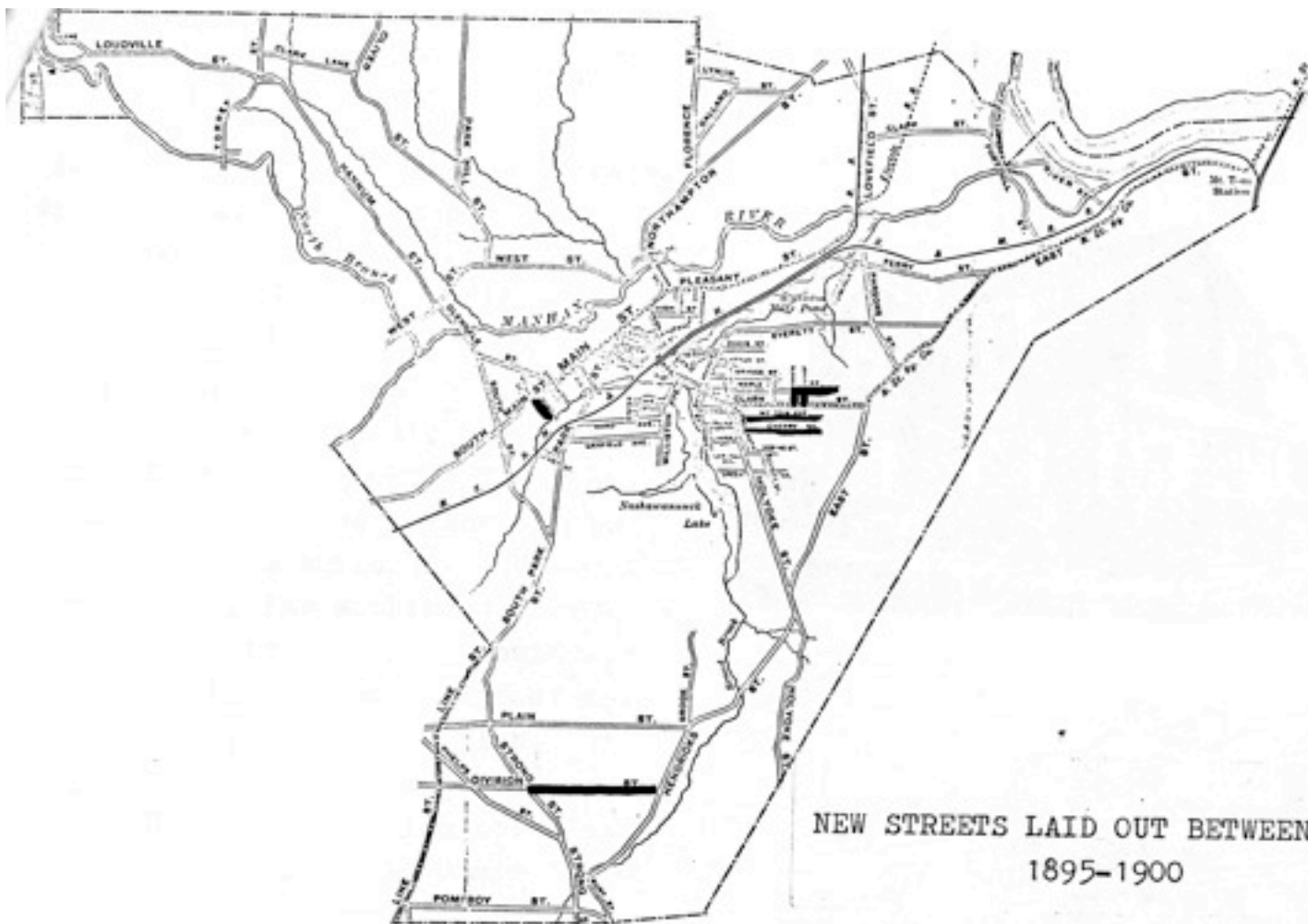
(brownstone), tile roof, and assymetrical massing. Designed by the Boston architectural firm of Peabody and stearns, it is one of the beautiful buildings of Easthampton. Along Union street are a number of fine turn of the century commercial blocks, several of which have pressed tin fronts. Although there is a virtual lack of any evidence, the town was well served by the trolley network, initially from Northampton down to the end of the residential section of Main street, but expanded by 1900 to include a connecting spur going east on Clark street. The trolley represented not only a dense residential population, in downtown Easthampton, but may have encouraged construction along its track and peripheral areas.

1900-1935

The period 1900 to 1935 was a period of growth, stability, and decline. C. 1900 the Williston Mills closed down, but were subsequently filled with the West Boylston Manufacturing Company. This cotton concern spurred continued growth for the community. Between 1900 and 1915, an estimated thirty-five new streets were laid out. For the period 1915 to 1920, only four new streets were opened up. With the ultimate shutting down of the trolley system and the impact of the Depression, growth was out of the picture. The type of housing which was built during this time should be examined.

With the West Boylston Manufacturing Co. came more jobs and the need for affordable housing. A number of factory apartment-like wood frame buildings were constructed in the vicinity of East and West





Pleasant Groves and Hampden Terrace. Another area was located in the Everett-Clark streets neighborhood. One of the more unusual factory housing varieties to be found in Easthampton is the hip roof with hip roof dormer buildings lining much of Everett street. The pattern created by the rhythm of the closely spaced buildings and the dormers is singular within the town.



Among single family residences built during the early part of this time period, the square plan, hip roof house was one of the most common. When accented with colonial motifs or finish, the house could easily be labeled as colonial revival; when finished with rusticate concrete block, combinations of clapboards with shingles, or two different exposure shingles, it is more akin to the bungalow style and can justly be called "bungaloid". The Merrick House on Main street is an extremely good example of the Arts and Crafts or Craftsman style. With its setting, exposed farter feet, and overall proportions, it is the ultimate luxury house probably ever built in Easthampton.



Probably the best public building of the period is the U.S. Post Office with its brick exterior, flared limestone lintels, and monumental entryway with pedimented portico.



IN CONCLUSION

Easthampton is blessed with a diversity of buildings and history. As such, it behooves both the town and the homeowners to respect its historic buildings. Unsympathetic application of vinyl or aluminum siding, which may destroy the proportions of the building should be avoided. Subsidized rehabs should be done with an eye toward the ultimate appearance of the building in addition to what the specific structural problem is.

With sensitivity and cyclical maintainance, Easthampton's cultural heritage should be around for many generations to enjoy.

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