

# Historical & Cultural Resources

**Mendon is filled with historic and cultural assets that residents wish to preserve and promote.**



In Mendon, significant opportunities exist for historical and cultural preservation. The town contains a great many historic buildings, scenic locations, and attractions, as well as a deep sense of community. Forests, farms, places of worship, small businesses, libraries, historic cemeteries, historic districts, and homes characterize the landscape. These historic sites span from the seventeenth century to today.

Mendon has two districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places: the Mendon Center Historic District and the North Avenue Rural Historic District. There are currently four local historic districts in town: the Mendon Center Local Historic District, the Taft Homestead Local Historic District, the Washington Street District, and the Jotham Hayward Homestead District.

Residents value Mendon's historic, architectural, aesthetic, and cultural heritage. Culturally significant locations include Founder's Park, Town Center, Town Hall, and Nipmuc Pond.

Historical and cultural preservation faces several challenges such as municipal policies and limitations in staffing, community support, collaboration between stakeholders, and homeowner resources.

Mendon can use zoning and federal, state, and local resources to maintain historic buildings and fund historic preservation. Adaptive reuse of historical buildings can bring these structures into modern use. Improving community engagement capacity, and creating guidelines to regulate development, are critical to integrating preservation and planning.

*Photo: Mendon Historical Museum. The Museum is located at 15 Hastings Street. It houses historical artifacts and documents about Mendon's history and curated exhibits set up in each of the rooms. The property was bequeathed to the Mendon Historical Society by former society President Berneta (Lowell) DeVries. The property belonged to the Lowell family for generations.*

# Historical & Cultural Resources Goals

The Historical and Cultural Resources goals of this Master Plan are:

## Goal 1

Ensure the protection of historical buildings and historical landscapes.

## Goal 2

Improve Mendon's planning processes and practices to better preserve Mendon's heritage.

## Goal 3

Provide adequate cultural opportunities for Mendon residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.



*Mendon resident and artist Doris Cox creates a portrait as local children look on.*

# Historical & Cultural Resources

## Introduction

Once a major industrial center rivaling Worcester, Mendon is now a quaint New England town on the shores of Nipmuc Pond. The beauty of Mendon arose from its rich history and natural landscape. Historic architecture and beauty are the cornerstones of Mendon's future. Residents are proud of its quaint New England feel and are interested in preserving the architecture, agriculture, and rural landscape.

To preserve history and natural beauty while promoting economic development, there must be considered planning for history and culture. This chapter of the Master Plan will focus on documenting Mendon's cultural and historic assets and will identify issues and opportunities that will aid in the preservation of Mendon's heritage. Recommendations will be made to further the goal of balancing historic preservation and economic development.

# Prior Planning Efforts

## 2007 Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report

The Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report<sup>1</sup> documented Mendon's historic landscape and identified priority areas for preservation. The report noted that development at the end of the 18th century focused on Lake Nipmuc Park, an early recreation attraction. Mendon has remained an agricultural community through the decades. Agriculture defined the landscape in 2007, and Mendon had large tracts of open space. The report identified areas of Mendon that are highly valued by residents and contribute to town character. Mendon Town Center was featured for its historical significance. Described as "the municipal and business heart of Mendon close to ... farm fields and scenic views," the report recommended strategies to protect the historic buildings in the area and the nearby agricultural land.

## Proposal for Local Historic Districts in the Town of Mendon

The Proposal for Local Historic Districts recommended Mendon approve the Mendon Center District and the Taft Homestead District, which comprised a total of fifty structures.<sup>2</sup> The report indicated the desire of residents to preserve Mendon's New England village look and history. The report also attempted to balance historic preservation and economic development by specifying that "preserving Mendon's history was not to be done at all costs." The Study Committee recommended "a combination of a natural contiguous area ... and establishing single structure districts that allows preservation of key structures." The Study Committee decided to focus on the "Triangle" of the town center and the Taft Homestead area.

The "Triangle" was characterized as an anchor with buildings of architectural and historic importance, including homes, churches, and commercial and community buildings. The adoption of the historic district designation would help protect these historic structures in the town center.

"The Mendon Center Historic District represents over three hundred years of growth and development of a New England farm community. Each stage of its long history is evinced in the buildings and landscape comprising the district."<sup>3</sup>

The center is still one of the most culturally significant areas and serves as a snapshot of Mendon's growth over the past three centuries.

Robert and Sarah Taft relocated to the area from Braintree in 1680 as some of the earliest settlers and were involved in the founding of Mendon. The Taft Homestead Historic District aims to preserve their home and farm, built in the late 1700s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation; John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor; Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor. June 2007. "Mendon Reconnaissance Report." <https://www.mass.gov/doc/mendon/download>

<sup>2</sup> Town of Mendon. n.d. "Proposal for Local Historic Districts in the Town of Mendon." [https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/file/file/4-10-17\\_lhdsc\\_report.pdf](https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/file/file/4-10-17_lhdsc_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## Historic District 2022 Expansion Study Report

In 2017, Mendon established the Mendon Center District and the Taft Homestead Districts, joining over 220 historic districts in Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> The historic districts allow for better historical preservation and appropriate development patterns. The Historic District Expansion Study recommended the creation of two more historic districts. The report identified the need to balance the preservation of historical resources with commercial growth. The extension of the Mendon Center district aims to “provide a balance and control that future commercial growth, [and] guide development in a manner that is in keeping and harmony with the historic character of [Mendon] and not at the expense of losing it.”<sup>6</sup>

The new Washington Street District aims to preserve the birch-tree-filled “Birch Alley.”

The period of 1830 – 1870 saw the transformation of Mendon from primarily a landscape of loosely distributed farms around a meeting house to a modern commercial village. After a period of prosperity and growth through the mid-1800s, Mendon’s development dropped off considerably until the very late 19th, early 20th centuries. Today’s remaining Washington Street houses illustrate these factors. The continued existence of peripheral farmland along Washington Street is a subtle but significant reminder of the antiquity of the town.<sup>7</sup>

The Jotham Hayward Homestead District comprises a single lot at 6 Bates Street. The Haywards settled in Mendon in the 1600s and participated in the early growth of the town. Because the area was zoned as part of a Highway Business district in 2013, many of the historic structures of this once-thriving commercial area are gone. It is of urgent importance that we protect the remaining structure from development, and the property owner has expressed her desire to see this property protected.<sup>8</sup>

Residents voted against adopting these two historic districts at the Town Meeting in May 2022.

## Commissions & Active Groups

### Community Preservation Committee

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) was adopted by residents in 2002. The CPA requires Mendon to collect a local surcharge and enables the town to apply for matching funds from the CPA Trust Fund. Projects eligible for funding include the acquisition or preservation of historic properties, the acquisition of open space for recreation, the creation of and support for affordable housing, and capital projects that support outdoor recreation. The Community Preservation Committee reviews funding applications.

### Historical Commission

The Historical Commission was established in 1974 “to protect and preserve the Town's cultural character and assets, be they archaeological sites, historic buildings, open spaces, landscapes, or historic districts.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Historic District Commission, Town of Mendon. Revised March 2022. “Historic District 2022 Expansion Study Report.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Town of Mendon. n.d. Historical Commission. <https://www.mendonma.gov/historical-commission>

The Commission is responsible for administering the Demolition Delay Bylaw. This bylaw encourages the preservation of historical buildings but does not permanently prevent demolition.

## Historic District Commission

The Historic District Commission was established in 2017 to administer the Historic District Bylaw. This bylaw provides mechanisms that protect and preserve buildings within designated historic districts. The two historic districts are the Mendon Center District and the Taft Homestead District.

## Mendon Cultural Council

The Cultural Council is a part of 329 local Cultural Councils in Massachusetts that support community projects. The Cultural Council is a “municipally appointed committee whose purpose is to promote cultural activities and events within Mendon and surrounding communities for the enrichment of its residents.” The Council aims to provide state grants to those in the arts, humanities, and sciences.<sup>10</sup>

## Mendon Historical Society

The Historical Society was established in 1896 and is dedicated to preserving the historical heritage of Mendon. The Historical Society aims “to cultivate and encourage among its members, a love for historical research, the accumulation and preservation of all matters of historical nature relating to Mendon.”<sup>11</sup> The society hosts events and workshops focused on education about historical assets and stories.

# History and Overview

### Precolonial Period (before 1675)

The Nipmuc people inhabited the area that is now Mendon and Worcester County. The name Nipmuc means “people of fresh waters.” In 1662, a deed containing a sixty-four square mile tract of land called Squinshepaug was signed by a Nipmuc chief. The land included what is now the towns of Bellingham, Upton, Uxbridge, Northbridge, Blackstone, and Millville. Mendon was incorporated in 1667. The first meeting house of Mendon was built in 1668 and is now the site of Founder’s Park.

### Colonial Period (1675-1775)

During King Phillip’s War in 1675, several settlers in Mendon were killed. Many were forced to abandon the town, including the prominent Taft family, who settled in Mendon in 1669 but moved to Braintree during the war. Mendon was burned to the ground in 1676, and the town was rebuilt in 1680.

### Federal and Early Industrial Periods (1775-1870)

In the late 1700s, the Blackstone Valley was a birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. Because of the lack of a significant waterway, towns broke from Mendon and Mendon remained an agricultural town. “With the additions of an elegant new meetinghouse, an imposing town hall, and stylish mansions and commercial buildings,” Mendon was transformed from an agricultural town to a quintessential New England village.<sup>12</sup> Most structures in town center were built in the early nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Town of Mendon n.d. Cultural Council. <https://www.mendonma.gov/cultural-council>

<sup>11</sup> Mendon Historical Society. n.d. <https://mendonhistoricalsociety.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Town of Mendon. n.d. “Proposal for Local Historic Districts in the Town of Mendon.” [https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/file/file/4-10-17\\_lhdsc\\_report.pdf](https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/file/file/4-10-17_lhdsc_report.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

### Late Industrial Period (1870-1915)

As industrialization took a toll on neighboring towns, Mendon retained its natural beauty. During the late nineteenth century, there was an increased appreciation for the beauty of Lake Nipmuc. Lake Nipmuc was a vacation spot for the wealthy of the region. Commercial development and recreational uses continued.

### Modern Period (1915-Present)

Mendon remained a quaint New England village in the last century. The population has steadily risen, and more homes were built at the end of the twentieth century. Commercial development is concentrated along Route 16, and Nipmuc Park remains a popular recreation spot. The history of Mendon and its natural beauty continues to attract visitors and new residents.

# Historical Resources Inventory

An inventory of Mendon’s historic resources can be found in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), managed by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Notable historic resources in Mendon are included in Table HC1, with some shown on Map HC1. The table below features select structures listed in the National Register of Historic Places District and Local Historic Districts.

Table 1: Major Historic Resources by Period

Property Name/Structure/Landscape	Location	Year	Historic Period
Old Mendon Cemetery	35 Main St	1702	Colonial 1675 - 1775
Ammidon Tavern	4 Main St	1745	
Swan - Wheelock House	26 Maple St	1800	
Thayer - Metcalf House	9 Main St	1810	
George Homestead	24 Main St	1815	
Taft - Brown House	6 Elm St	1820	Federal 1776 - 1830
Haywood, Ebenezer - Davenport House	7 Hastings St	1820	
Hastings, Seth House	10 Hastings St	1820	
Hastings Law Office - Mendon Post Office	13 Main St	1820	
Mendon Unitarian Church	13 Maple St	1820	
Hayward - Taft House	38 Maple St	1820	
Mendon Bank	3 Main St	1825	
Metcalf, Walter T. House	15 Hastings St	1830	
North Congregational Church	7 Main St	1830	
Metcalf, Dr. John G. House	3 Hastings St	1831	
Goss - Childs House	5 Main St	1831	Early Industrial 1831 - 1870
Mendon Post Office - Aldrich General Store	1 Maple St	1833	
Aldrich, W. H. House	15 Main St	1834	
Davenport, J. G. House	11 Maple St	1835	
Hastings, Anna Warren House	5 Maple St	1838	
Allen - Scribner House	20 Maple St	1838	
Cook - Holbrook - Whiting House	4 Hastings St	1840	
Hastings, Charles C. P. House	6 Hastings St	1840	
Cook - Adams House	23 Hastings St	1840	
Rawson - Smith House	23 Main St	1840	
Craig - Brown House	25 Main St	1840	
George House	28 Main St	1840	
Weatherhead House	3 Maple St	1840	
Cook, L. House	15 Maple St	1840	
Anthony, B. - Inman House	17 Maple St	1840	
Thayer - Comstock House	22 Maple St	1840	
Eames, D. - Wallahan House	23 Maple St	1840	
Hayward - Bridgedale House	24 Maple St	1840	
Eames - Wallahan House	28 Maple St	1840	
Allen - Grow House	33 Main St	1841	
Harrison Hall - Mendon Town Hall	20 Main St	1844	
Albee, Holland Bakery Worker Housing	8 Hastings St	1845	
Comstock, W. H. House	1 Hastings St	1850	
South Parish Unitarian Church Parsonage	17 Hastings St	1850	

Davenport - Bartlett House	9 Maple St	1850	
Ballou, Sumner House	4 Elm St	1855	
Taft - Cook House	5 Elm St	1855	
Wheelock - George, Nathan R. House	1 Maple St Extension	1865	
Wood's Civil War Memorial	Maple St	1891	
Union Chapel - Taft Public Library	18 Main St	1896	
Mendon Center Garden Center	7 Hastings St	1900	<b>Late Industrial 1871 - 1915</b>
Memorial Square	Main St	1900	
Draper Company Worker Housing - Boarding House	10 Main St	1910	
First Meetinghouse Historic Site Marker	Milford Rd	1910	
Mendon Highway Department Garage	20 Main St	1940	
Mendon Fire Station	20 Main St	1948	
French and Indian - Revolutionary War Monument	Main St	1967	<b>Early Modern and Modern 1915 - present</b>
Sunset Apartments	9 Blackstone St	1970	
The Loft	14 Hastings St	1970	
U. S. Post Office - Mendon Branch	2-12 Maple St	1980	

Map HC1: Mendon Historic Districts

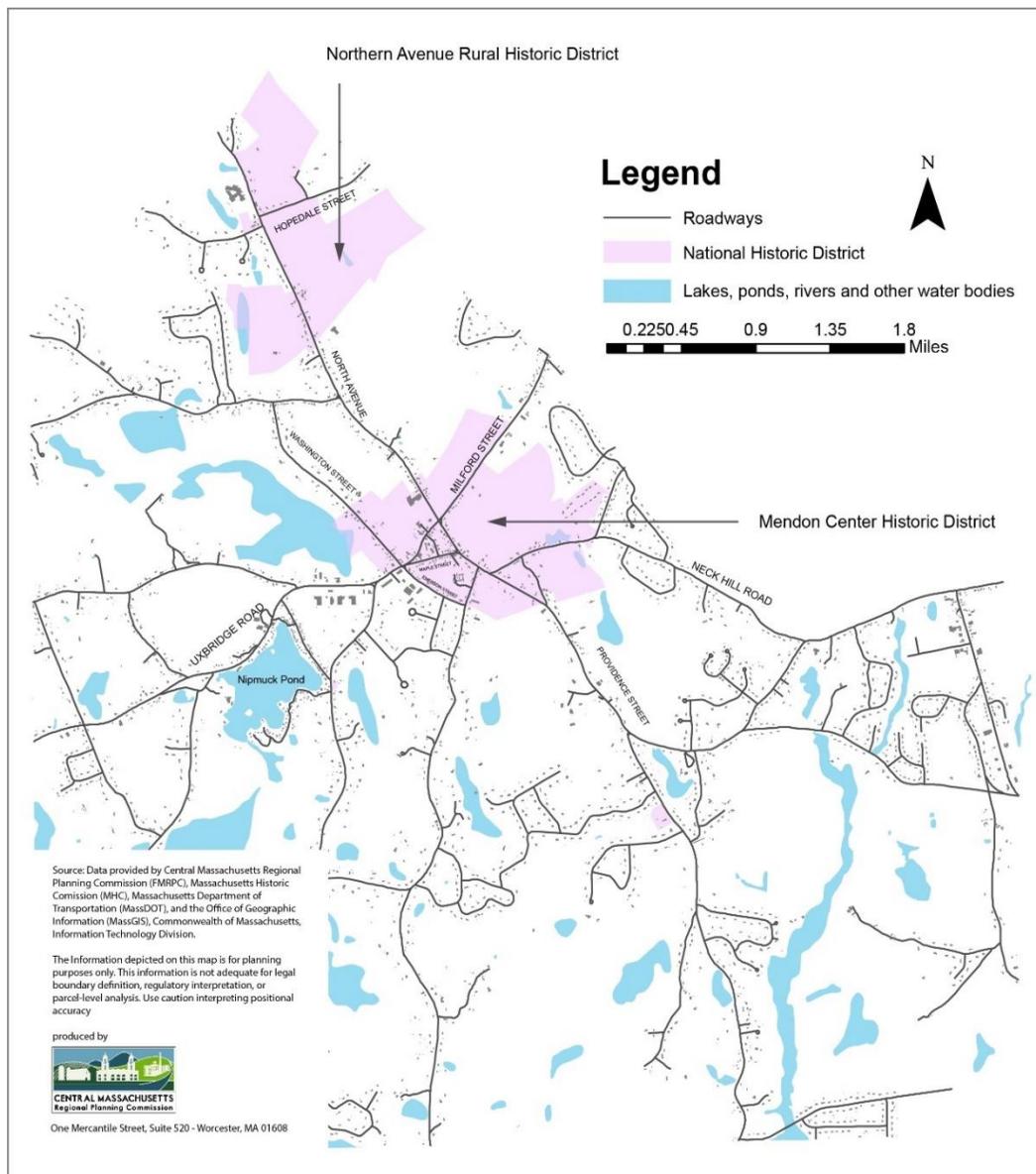


Table HC2: Major Historic Resources by Type

<b>Historic Structures</b>	Bellingham Road Bridge Memorial Square Old Post Road Aldrich, Nathan C. Stone Wall	
<b>Historic Areas</b>	Mendon Center Historic District (Mendon Center Local Historic District) North Avenue Rural Historic District Aldrich, Than C. House and Resthaven Chapel Mendon Single Building Local Historic District (Taft Homestead Local Historic District) *Washington Street Local Historic District (Pending) *Jothem Hayward Homestead Local Historic District (Pending)	
<b>Historic Buildings (Located on the following streets)</b>	Asylum Street Bates Street Bellingham Street Blackstone Street Cape Road Elm Street Emerson Street Gaskill Street George Street Harrington Street Hartford Avenue East Hartford Avenue West Hastings Street Hopedale Street Main Street Maple Street Maple Street Extension Milford Road	Millville Road Miscoe Road Morey Street North Avenue Northbridge Road Park Street Pleasant Street Powers Road Providence Street Quisset Road Southwick Street Taft Avenue Thayer Road Thornton Street Trask Road Uxbridge Street Washington Street Wood's Civil War Memorial
<b>Historic Markers, Monuments and Other Objects</b>	Founder's Park Memorial Tablet French and Indian-Revolutionary War Monument Meetinghouses Site Marker Mendon Memorial Watering Trough First Meetinghouse Historic Site Marker Old Post Road Granite Marker King Phillip's War Historic Site Marker George Cemetery	
<b>Historic and Significant Cemeteries</b>	Old Mendon Cemetery Quaker - Friends Cemetery Cemetery located at 90 North Avenue Gaskill Cemetery	

Source: MACRIS 2022

## Historic Districts

Mendon has two historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places. The Mendon Center Historic District and the North Avenue Rural Historic District are also local historic districts. Mendon intends to establish Washington Street District and Jotham Hayward Homestead District.

### Mendon Center Historic District

This district consists of about four hundred acres of village and rural landscape, almost undisturbed by development. Residential, agricultural, small commercial, religious, and institutional development are permitted in this district. The district reflects the architecture and landscape of the early nineteenth century. Street plans feature the irregular radiating street patterns of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century

village.<sup>14</sup> These streets served as connections between Boston, Worcester, Hartford, and Providence. Mendon has always remained an agricultural and light industrial-oriented village throughout its history. This is reflected by the farmhouses and smaller residential dwellings in the district. The dimensions and density of the district were solidified in the 1830s. The district has become a nostalgic and picturesque New England village, a rural retreat for urban dwellers, and a place of immense pride for the Mendon community. The Mendon Center Historic District was established in 2017.



### **Northern Avenue Rural Historic District**

This district consists of 345 acres of rural landscape, with “farmhouses, barns, fields, woods, marshes, and stone walls.”<sup>15</sup> Many historic farms and non-farm dwellings can be found here, including the Lovett-Quigley Farm, the Davenport-Taft House, the Quigley-Eldridge House, a schoolhouse, a community cemetery, and the house at Maple Farm. The district reflects the town planning of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the architectural design of the nineteenth century. There are eight historic farms, some of the first in Mendon. Although farming has ceased in all but one of these preserved farms, the

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<sup>14</sup> National Register of Historic Places Mendon Center Historic District Registration Form. n.d. <https://mhc-macris.net/#!/queryresults>

<sup>15</sup> National Register of Historic Places, The Town of Mendon, Northern Avenue Rural Historic District. n.d. <https://mhc-macris.net/#!/queryresults>

landscape and lot boundaries have been preserved. Though some of the district has been converted into modern residential uses, this area reflects Mendon's development over three centuries.

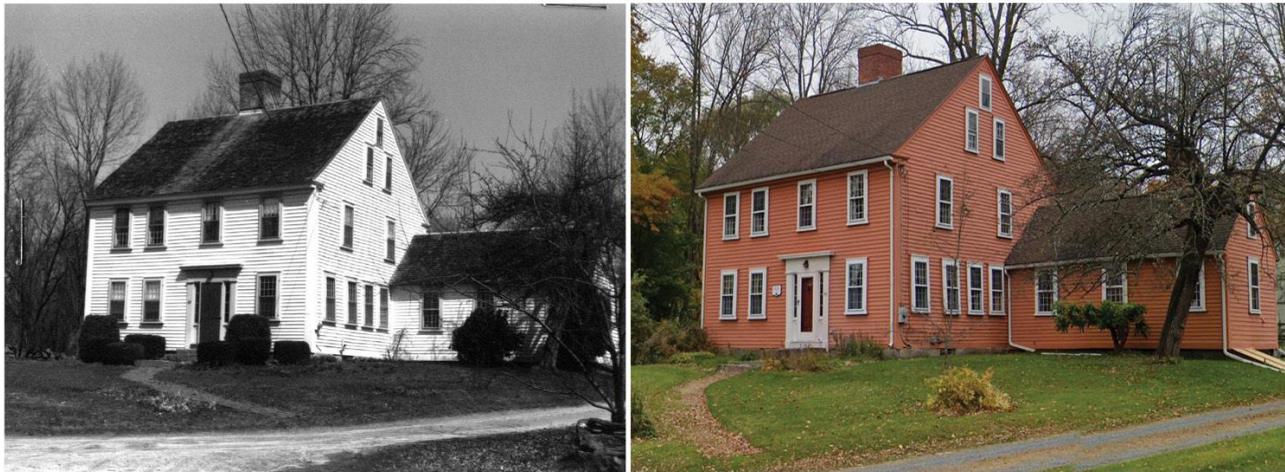


### **Taft Homestead Local Historic District**

The Taft Homestead Local Historic District is a single-lot local historic district at the intersection of Millville Rd and Taft Avenue by the Nipmuc Pond, about two miles from the village center of Mendon. It is a residential farmhouse located on the home site of the Taft family, dating back to the eighteenth century when the family moved back to Mendon from Braintree after being forced to leave Mendon by the violent King Phillip's War. The Taft family members were some of the most important founders of Mendon and the surrounding areas. The site where they built their original house was marked by a stone, erected by the Taft Family Association in 1955. This colonial-style building represents the growth of the Taft family farm from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission, Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, Taft Homestead Local Historic District Registration Form. n.d. <https://mhc-macris.net/#!/queryresults>



### **Washington Street Local Historic District<sup>17</sup>**

This proposed district was recommended by the Historic District Commission and is located northwest of the Mendon Center Historic District. The district highlights the rural landscape of Mendon. Washington Street witnessed Mendon's changes over the past two centuries and is known for birch trees and a visit from George Washington.

The area was once primarily farmland which became more residential as the town center (the triangle of Hastings, Main, and Maple streets) became more developed. With the introduction of the Milford – Uxbridge Trolley line at the turn of the 20th century and the establishment of the town as a place of retreat showcasing Nipmuc Lake Park new employment opportunities arose outside of the farming industry. Transportation improvements allowed people to make their home in Mendon and commute to work. The housing growth at that time rendered Cape style homes, craftsman style homes and modest bungalows many of which line Washington Street. Later development continued at a slower pace as residential neighborhoods and developments were being established in other parts of the town. As a result, Washington Street has been able to retain its modest and rural character for many years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The district is yet to be established. It is recommended by the Historic District Commission in the report published in 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Town of Mendon, Historic District Commission. Revised August 29, 2022. "Historic District 2022 Expansion Study Report."

[https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/uploads/washington\\_st\\_new\\_district\\_proposal\\_11.3.22.pdf](https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/uploads/washington_st_new_district_proposal_11.3.22.pdf)



### **Jotham Hayward Homestead Local Historic District<sup>19</sup>**

This proposed local historic district consists of a single 1.57-acre lot located at the intersection of Bates Street and Cape Road, with a structure registered in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System facing Bates Street. The lot features historic fieldstone walls, a garage, an early altered cape-style residential structure, and a shed close to Cape Road.<sup>20</sup> The Hayward family members were involved in the town during Mendon's early history. This proposed district is in an area that was also referred to as South Milford. This area developed into a commercial center when the town center developed and travel became difficult for residents in the area. The area was zoned as a Highway Business district in 2013, and many of the historic structures and landscapes have been destroyed. The Historic District Commission recommended this low be established as a historic district to preserve what remains of the area.

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<sup>19</sup> The district is yet to be established. It is recommended by the Historic District Commission in the report published in 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission. Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System Registration Form. n.d. <https://mhc-macris.net/#!/queryresults>



## Historic District Commission Design Guidelines

### Aims and Purposes

The design guidelines were created to promote architectural preservation, the maintenance of unique features of historic structures, and the encouragement of appropriate development in historic districts.<sup>21</sup> The guidelines were developed by the Historic District Commission, Massachusetts Historical Commission, and neighboring towns. The Historical Commission is charged with reviewing exterior change proposals for historic properties, places, public streets, ways, and bodies of water.<sup>22</sup> The design guidelines apply to the Mendon Center Historic District and the Taft Homestead Historic District.

### Application and Certification Process

All applicants who seek to alter historic structures not listed as an Exclusion must apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-applicability. A public hearing may be required to discuss alterations to the property. The Historic District Commission will mail a notice to those deemed

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<sup>21</sup> Town of Mendon, Historic District Commission. Revised August 29, 2022. "Historic District Commission Design Guidelines."

[https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/uploads/2022.09.16\\_mendon\\_historic\\_district\\_commission\\_design\\_guidelines\\_9.16.22\\_2.pdf](https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif881/f/uploads/2022.09.16_mendon_historic_district_commission_design_guidelines_9.16.22_2.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

“materially affected” ten days before a decision is assigned should the commission determine a hearing is not necessary.<sup>23</sup>

### **Design Guidelines**

The Mendon Historic Commission will follow the general standards of Treatment of Historic Properties identified by the United States Department of Interior.

- a. A property should be used for its historic purpose or placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristic of the building and its site and environment.
- b. The historic character of the property should be retained and preserved.
- c. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize the property should be avoided.
- d. Changes to the property that have acquired historic significance in their own right should be retained and preserved.
- e. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property should be preserved.
- f. Deteriorated historic features should be repaired rather than replaced. Where deterioration is severe and requires the replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature should match the design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of a missing feature should be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
- g. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction that destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property should be avoided. They should be compatible with the features of the original building such as materials, size, and scale to protect the integrity of the structure.<sup>24</sup>

### **Specific Design Guidelines**

In addition to the general design guidelines, there are specific design guidelines for features including chimneys, masonry, doors, fences, foundations, gutters, downspouts, drainage, additions, structures, outbuildings, sheds, gazebos, pools, porches, stoops, balconies, porticos, stairways, steps, railing, roofs, siding trim, siding paint, shutters, windows, lighting, and signage.

Building demolition is discouraged and requires the approval of the Historical Commission except when ordered by the Building Inspector or other safety office for reasons of public health and safety. Renovation or replacement of features is preferred to demolition and removal of features. Trim, brackets, bays, doors, windows, and porch columns should not be removed without approval from the commission.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

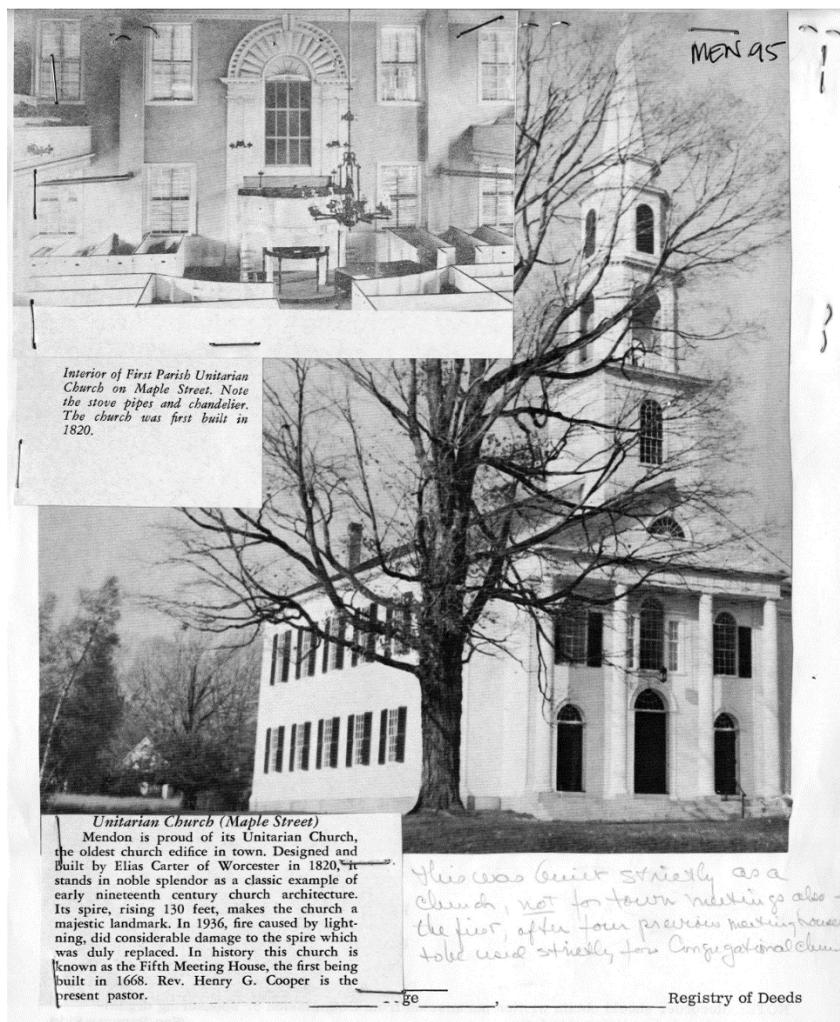
<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## Historical and Cultural Destinations

### The Mendon Unitarian Church

The Mendon Unitarian Church, which served as the fifth meeting house of Mendon, was preceded by Mendon's first meeting house, destroyed during King Phillip's War. In 1819, it was decided that a new meeting house was necessary, so the town contracted Elias Carter, known for his work in Central Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, to design the building.<sup>26</sup> The Federal-style Unitarian Church was built in 1820 and stands proudly at the center of Mendon, surrounded by modest early nineteenth-century houses on Maple Street. The church is the most visible symbol of Mendon and is one of the most significant Federal-style meetinghouses in the United States. For 170 years, the church has been the center of religious life in Mendon, overlooking the beautiful landscape of Mendon. The steeple replaced after the original was destroyed by a fire caused by a lightning strike.<sup>27</sup>



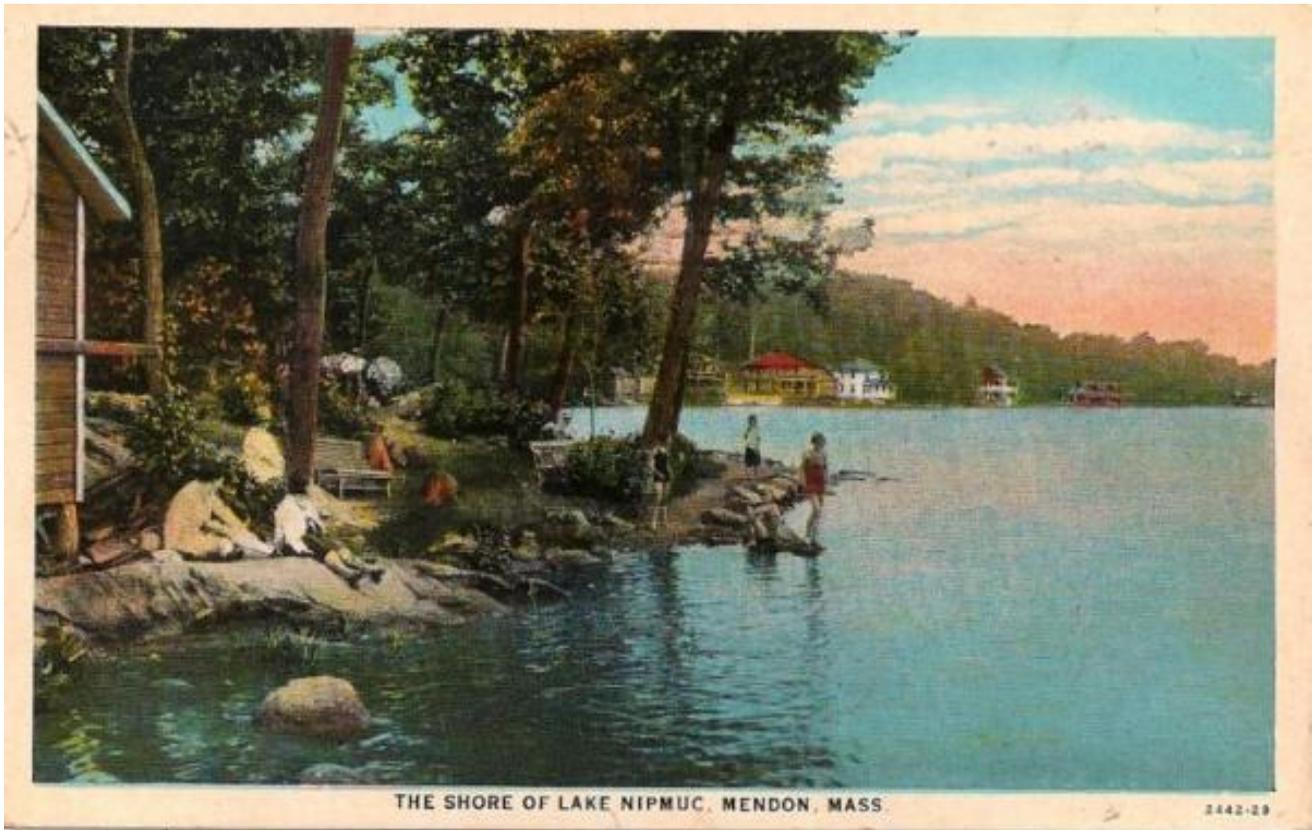
### Nipmuc Pond

Nipmuc Pond, also known as Lake Nipmuc, is a water body near the Taft Homestead Historic District. The Nipmuc people were the first people to use the body of water until King Phillip's War. The water served agricultural purposes for the new families who moved to Mendon after the war. Due to pollution and industrialization in the area, Nipmuc Pond was a popular resort area for the wealthy of the region in the late nineteenth century. In 1901, the Milford-Uxbridge Electric Railway started operations and provided access to the water for residents and visitors, and brought commercial development to the area, including a theatre and restaurants. The pond remains a significant part of Mendon and the region's natural beauty and provides community pride with recreational opportunities, including swimming and boating.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Massachusetts Historical Commission. Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System Registration Form. n.d. <https://mhc-macris.net/#!/queryresults>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> History of Lake Nipmuc. n.d. <https://www.hope1842.com/hope1842/lakenipmuc.html>



### **Mendon Historical Museum**

The Mendon Historical Museum is located at 15 Hastings Street in the Mendon Center Historic District. The building belonged to the Lowell family for generations until the building was gifted to the Mendon Historical Society in 2017.

The old museum at 3 Main Street was built in 1825. The building served many uses, including as a bank, a law office, a school, a library, and a storage facility. The former museum no longer houses any historical artifacts and is the property of the municipal government.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Mendon Historical Society. n.d. <https://mendonhistoricalsociety.org/museum/>

### **Nathan C. Aldrich House and Resthaven Chapel**

The Nathan Aldrich House is located at 111 Providence Street next to the spring brook. The Georgian-style stone house was built in 1830 for Thomas Aldrich. The house is different from the rest of the housing stock. Located on the same lot is the Gothic Revival-style Resthaven Chapel, built with stones collected from the farm from 1899 to 1900 after the Seabury family purchased the farm. The chapel is associated with Catherine Regina Seabury, who founded the Women's Mutual Improvement Society in 1889. In 1912, Seabury opened a college-preparatory school for girls in the chapel, as part of the movement to extend educational opportunities to women. The school only operated for a few years before closing during the First World War. Since Miss Seabury purchased the old farm on which the Resthaven Chapel now sits, the chapel has welcomed working women for their rest, recreation, and academic endeavors.

*"Many were the happy gatherings there, thirty and forty girls at a time, bubbling over with fun and frolic, yet always singing the club song, 'onward, ever onward,' and always ready to reach a helping hand to those less fortunate than themselves. Countless stories are told of those happy days when Miss Seabury was at once hostess, leader, and the inspiration of them all"<sup>30</sup>*

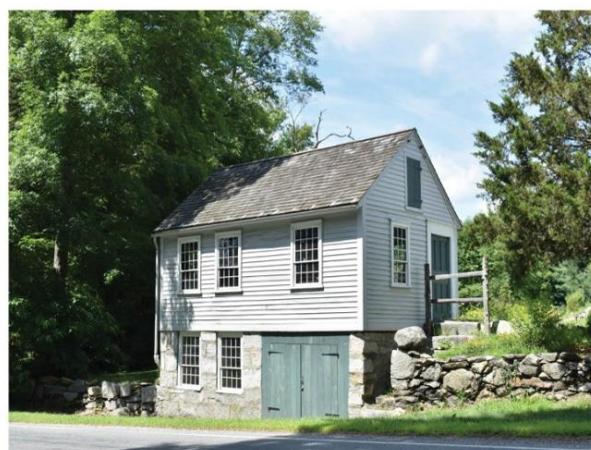


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<sup>30</sup> Massachusetts Historic Commission, National Register Individual Property. n.d.  
<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcnat/natidx.htm>

## **Olney Cook Artisan Shop and Farm**

Located at 54 Hartford Avenue, the Olney Cook Artisan shop is a notable example of a small-scale vernacular New England industrial shop. The shop was constructed in the 1830s and is an important architectural reference for the early industrial history of Mendon. The historic architecture was restored by the Historic Commission according to the standards of the Department of Interior. The Olney family contributed significantly to Mendon beginning in the 1660s. Members of the Olney family served during the Civil War, and others were involved in civic affairs. The shop served several commercial uses. Shops of this kind served “unmechanized cottage industries, primarily boot- and shoemaking” and flourished in the more rural area of northern Mendon. The boot and shoe industry employed more than two hundred people in Mendon alone. Other smaller industries, included window-glazing, leather goods, woodworking, brickmaking, and straw-hat manufacturing.<sup>3132</sup>



## **The Union Chapel – Old Taft Public Library**

The Taft Public Library was located at 18 Main Street, next to Town Hall. Built as a chapel in 1896, the Shingle-style structure served as the library from 1920 until 2016 when the Catholic church Saint Michael the Archangel on North Street was acquired by the town.<sup>33</sup> Union Chapel was a local center of religious life, education, cultural, and social focus before serving as a library. The Taft Public Library was established in 1881 through a gift from the Taft family. The first library was housed in what is now the Mendon Historical Museum. In 1920, the town purchased the Union Chapel through the gift of the Taft family. In 1938, a hurricane hit the region and damaged the roof and chimney, which were later restored.<sup>34</sup>

When the library opened in 1881, it had 1,478 volumes, and the first year had 329 borrowers. During the inauguration of the library, Reverend Carlton Staples’ address reads:

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<sup>31</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission Registration Form. n.d. <https://mhc-macris.net/#!/queryresults>

<sup>32</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission, National Register of Individual Property. n.d.

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcnat/natidx.htm>

<sup>33</sup> Taft Public Library. n.d. [https://www.taftpubliclibrary.org/?page\\_id=340](https://www.taftpubliclibrary.org/?page_id=340)

<sup>34</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission, National Register of District Preservation Restriction. n.d.

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/ppdhpp.htm>

*“This library has been founded especially for the young. It is the earnest desire of the donor that they may regard it especially as their institution and take a deep interest in its preservation and usefulness.”<sup>35</sup>*



### **The Taft Public Library**

In 2016, the Taft Public Library was moved to 29 North Avenue from 18 Main Street after the town realized that the library needed space for expansion and to better serve Mendon residents. Saint Michael the Archangel was converted into the modern Taft Public Library through 1.7 million dollars of renovation.<sup>36</sup> The library serves as an important part of life in Mendon. The library hosts language programs, arts & culture events, cooking classes, reading sessions, and events for children.

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<sup>35</sup> The town of Mendon. n.d. “History of the Library.” <https://www.mendonma.gov/taft-public-library#:~:text=The%20Library%20opened%20for%20the,th%20first%20year%20was%20329>.

<sup>36</sup> Bronislaus B. Kush. January 10, 2013. Worcester Telegram and Gazette. <https://www.telegram.com/story/news/local/north/2013/01/11/prayer-books/49166259007/>



The former St. Michael's Church is at 29 North Ave. *Telegram & Gazette*



## **Harrison Hall – Mendon Town Hall**

Mendon Town Hall is in the Mendon Center Historic District on Main Street. The magnificent Green Revival-style Harrison Hall Built was built near the old Taft Library and the old fire station. The building is an example of nineteenth-century temple-form town hall architecture. Built in 1844, at the height of Mendon's economic prosperity, Harrison Hall was the site of many town meetings.<sup>37</sup>

In its early years as Town Hall, a Mr. Dudley retained the second floor for his use, given that he provided the land for the town hall. In 1849, Mendon purchased the entire building and renamed it Mendon Town Hall. Mendon High School was housed on the second floor from 1868 to 1903, and the town hall has served many civic uses since 1903, including elected and appointed officials' offices and town offices.<sup>38</sup>

Today, the town hall stands proudly at the town center and witnesses the changes time has brought Mendon over the past three centuries.



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<sup>37</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission, National Register of Historic Places. n.d. <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcnat/natidx.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Mendon Town Hall. n.d. <https://www.hope1842.com/hope1842/mendontownhall.html>

## Old Mendon Cemetery

This 2.15-acre cemetery is located in the Mendon Center Historic District. The cemetery serves as the resting place of many prominent people who live in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mendon dedicated this land to a cemetery in the late 1600s, and the oldest stone dates to the early 1700s.<sup>39</sup> The graveyard is surrounded by natural vegetation and is the oldest cemetery out of the seventeen in Mendon. The stones in the graveyard are:

*“Irreplaceable collection of folklore and art and should be preserved as though they were priceless paintings. [...] These stones exemplify the craftsmanship of the stonecutter, engraver, and motif of the era. [...] As you walk through its well-cared-for grounds and ancient stones, you will see various names from Mendon’s past: Aldrich, Ammidon, Chapin, Davenport, Harding, Hastings, Holbrook, Metcalf, Rawson, Rockwood, Staples, Thayer, Taft, Torry, Tyler, Whipple, Wood, and many others.”<sup>40</sup>*



<sup>39</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission, National Register of Historic Places. n.d.

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcnat/natidx.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Mendon Cemeteries n.d. <https://www.hope1842.com/hope1842/mendoncemeteries.html>

## Founder's Park

This park was the site of Mendon's first meetinghouse and noteworthy events in the history of Mendon. A meetinghouse was built here in 1668 to conduct town meetings and practice religion. During King Phillip's War, this meetinghouse was destroyed. After the town was resettled in 1680, Mendon built a second meetinghouse on this site. "The land served as the town's cornerstone of democracy and Puritan theology."<sup>41</sup> The site was a general store beginning in the 1830s, and it was a boarding house for workers on the Milford-Uxbridge Electric Railway until 1901 when the house was torn down to build Founder's Park. The site has served many uses as Mendon changed from a rural agricultural settlement to a prosperous New England village, and it witnessed many significant moments.<sup>42</sup>



## Mendon Town Forest

The Town Forest is located off Millville Road and has served recreational uses for many years. The town converted a private property into the town forest in 1944, acquiring 120 acres of land and 2.5 acres across Millville Road, the forest has many historic sites for visitors to explore. There have been efforts to improve the forest, such as signage, maps, boardwalks, and trail markers. Today, the forest is a destination for nature lovers across the region and a site to soak in Mendon's history and tranquility.<sup>43</sup>

# Issues and Opportunities

Mendon does not have enough laws and regulations to protect its historic assets compared to other communities in Massachusetts. Some laws need updates and the tools that the town has are not sufficient to preserve historic structures. Mendon has lost historic buildings over time. The town also lacks the staffing to conduct community outreach and engagement to educate citizens about the history of Mendon, its historic assets, and the importance of preservation. Mendon does not have a central location for historical information, and this system is not enough to preserve Mendon's history and culture.

Mendon has opportunities when it comes to preservation due to its stock of historic buildings, scenic beauty, parks and other attractions, and community coherence and identity. Many bylaws and regulations already exist to protect historic assets. Mendon will benefit tremendously if it can take advantage of these

<sup>41</sup> Mendon Founders Park n.d. <https://www.hope1842.com/hope1842/founderspark.html>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Wigwam Hill and Mendon Town Forest. n.d. <https://www.mendonma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf881/f/file/file/wigwamhillthetownforestre9.pdf>

regulations to achieve a balance between historical and cultural preservation and commercial development. Mendon's natural beauty will attract development opportunities, and if regulated to coexist with historic assets, these opportunities can bring funding to promote historic preservation. Historic districts and buildings have helped the town obtain more tools to preserve Mendon's history. The organizations and cultural destinations in town can serve as the cornerstone for engaging the community.

## Recommendations

We recommend that Mendon use protective zoning, regulatory, and legislative tools, and federal and state resources to maintain historic buildings and fund preservation. We recommend the adaptive reuse of historical buildings to bring them back to 21st-century uses.

We recommend increasing the capacity for community engagement as well as the creation of more efficient tools to gather and store information about Mendon's history and culture.

To improve Mendon's planning processes to better preserve historic assets, we recommend that planning actively involves historic preservation organizations to put preservation at the forefront of local planning. We recommend the development of new guidelines to regulate development so historic preservation is in tandem with increasing amenities for residents.

Detailed strategies and actionable items are provided in the following section.

## Summary of Strategies

The Master Plan recommends the following Historical and Cultural Resources strategies, which were developed to account for public preference, existing conditions and trends, best practices, and state and federal laws.

### **Goal 1: Ensure the protection of historic buildings and landscapes.**

- Objective 1: Use protective zoning, regulatory, and legislative tools to preserve and maintain Town-owned and, optionally, privately-owned historical assets.
  - Action Item 1: Update Historic District Bylaw and Scenic Route Bylaw in a timely and proactive manner.
  - Action Item 2: Identify and adopt additional historic districts such as the Nipmuc Pond area.
  - Action Item 3: Add to the Historic District Design Guidelines and utilize and update zoning regulations.
  - Action Item 4: Identify historical buildings, land, monuments, and historically important sites outside the boundaries of the currently designated historic districts to protect these assets.
- Objective 2: Use Federal, state, and local resources to fund and maintain historic and cultural preservation in a timely and proactive manner to develop a sustainable funding plan for the critical maintenance of historical public buildings.
  - Action Item 1: Mendon could consider taking advantage of the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act to continue to improve historical preservation, open space improvement, and housing efforts.

- Action Item 2: The town could consider applying for the Massachusetts Preservation Project Fund (MPPF). This is a grant from the Massachusetts Historic Commission and could reimburse up to half of the cost of a preservation project.
- Objective 3: Encourage the adaptive reuse of historic buildings to bring buildings back to life.
  - Action Item 1: Identify historical structures that are susceptible to demolition.
  - Action Item 2: Encourage historical property owners to consider adaptive reuse alternatives.
  - Action Item 3: Encourage developers to consider adaptive reuse alternatives.
  - Action Item 4: Use design guidelines and other laws and regulations to restrict development that is detrimental to Mendon's historical and cultural heritage.

**Goal 2. Provide adequate cultural opportunities for Mendon residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.**

- Objective 1: Ensure there are cultural opportunities that cater to the needs and desires of all town residents.
  - Action Item 1: Identify historical and cultural preservation needs in Mendon with renewed community engagement efforts.
- Objective 2: Increase community engagement and outreach capacity.
  - Action Item 1: Establish more educational programs for residents of all ages and backgrounds.
  - Action Item 2: Collaborate with other historic preservation organizations and agencies, community organizations, and other historical and cultural institutions and organizations to engage the community.
  - Action Item 3: Identify and collaborate with regional partners such as historic preservation organizations and higher education institutions.
  - Action Item 4: Expand the historical preservation volunteer base to preserve historical assets and educate residents and visitors about Mendon's history, culture, and the importance of historic and cultural preservation.
  - Action Item 5: Consider utilizing the National Trust Preservation Funds to fund education programs and preservation projects.
- Objective 3: Develop efficient public access to historical information about Mendon.
  - Action Item 1: Increase data collection capacity to collect more information about Mendon's historical assets for research and educational purposes.
  - Action Item 2: Create a central location to store information and data related to the history and culture of Mendon.
  - Action Item 3: Involve the community and spur residents' passion for preserving Mendon's heritage.

**Goal 3: Improve Mendon's planning processes and practices to better preserve Mendon's heritage.**

- Objective 1: Involve historical preservation in planning.

- Action Item 2: Collaborate with historic preservation organizations, agencies, and subject matter experts to ensure historical preservation is in tandem with planning efforts.
- Objective 2: Develop guidelines, plans, and a vision to achieve a balance between more beneficial commercial development, open spaces, and historic preservation.
  - Action Item 1: Plan for the vacant Taft Orchards
  - Action Item 2: Draft guidelines to involve historical preservation in all new development.