

A Walking Tour of Northfield, Massachusetts



c1845

“On either side of the street, at convenient distances, stand the buildings composing the village —

a Congregational meeting house

a spacious school house, two stories

58 dwelling houses, two of three stories, 40 of two, 16 of one . . .”

Rudolphus Dickinson, 1811

Welcome to "The Street"

Northfield's Main Street still retains the look and charm of a quiet, 19th-century village. Along "The Street" stand thirteen 18th-century houses and sixty-eight 19th-century buildings. Looking north from the Town Hall, you can still recognize the Unitarian Church and other buildings depicted in the 1845 drawing reproduced on the front of this brochure. "The Street" as you see it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as one of our nation's historical and cultural resources. A commemorative monument on the Town Hall lawn was erected by the Historical Commission and the Fortnightly Club in 1983.

Main Street has remained the center of town since the first settlement in 1673. The pattern of the street, with home lots and crop land in the meadow, changes in the outlying districts to home and farm on the same site. Across the Great River is West Northfield. To the east, the south, and on the mountain, early houses still survive. Agriculture was the backbone of the community from earliest times.

Northfield is a living gem. If, on this visit, you have only had time for the Main Street walk, you will nonetheless have experienced the essence of Northfield, past and present. Do come again.

Please Note: The houses on this tour are private and are not open to the public.



Some Architectural Styles Found on "The Street"

Georgian Colonial. Popular from about 1730 to 1780, the style is most easily recognized by the two-story symmetry of windows, center doorway with ornate hood, steep roof, and brick or frame construction. Based on English classical architecture.

Federal. Dating from the mid-1770's, the Federal style is light and graceful with narrow windows, porches with slender columns, doorway fanlights and sidelights, a low roofline, tall chimneys, and shutters. Carved ornamentation is geometric and delicate, and the houses are box or rectangular-shaped.

Greek Revival. This style of architecture began around 1800. It imitates classical Greek buildings and temples with several columns supporting the front entrance portico; also features doorway detailing and a simple rectangular shape. The style became popular again after the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and lasted until after World War I.

Victorian Gothic. A reaction against the formal Greek Revival style, Victorian Gothic architecture features detailing under the eaves, steep-pitched roofs, wooden-clapboard or board-and-batten construction, wide front porches, and a front entrance on one side. These houses often have large bay windows with arched wooden hoods. The style was popular from the end of the Civil War until the late 1880's.

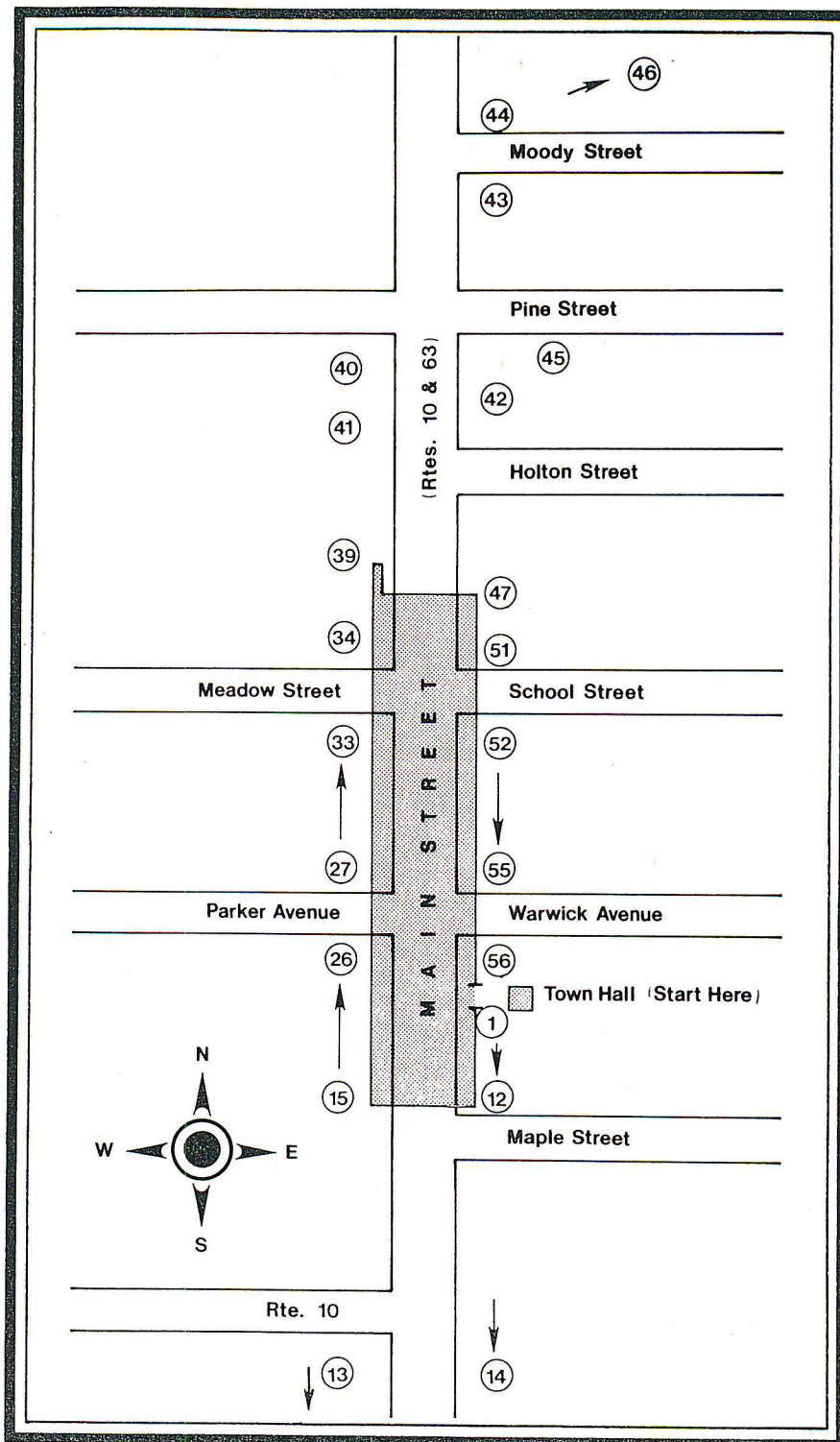
Bungalow. Bungalow houses, popular throughout the United States from 1900 to about 1930, came from California to the east. Bungalows are generally a story-and-a-half with wide, low roofs. They are built of brick and wood, and have low, wide gables in the front. There are usually enclosed porches or sunrooms, projecting doorway roofs, and brackets under the entryway roofs.

A Tribute . . .

to the Stearns family of architect-builders, 1799-1860. The brothers Calvin and Samuel Stearns, with Calvin's sons George, Charles, Calvin S., Marshall, Albert and Edward, built or worked on many of the fine homes still seen in Northfield. They were men of vision who brought the "new" Federal and Greek Revival styles to town.

Both Calvin and Sam worked on Bullfinch's India Wharf stores, on a Peter Banner house in Boston, and on an Asher Benjamin house in Windsor, Vermont.

These architect-builder-contractors were responsible for training many local apprentices who carried on in their tradition of attention to details and craftsmanship. The account and day books of the Stearns builders survive and are a primary source of information on individual houses.



egin at the Town Hall . . .

The public parking lot at the rear of the Town Hall is a good place to leave your car. Turn left at the Town Hall and head south down Main Street.

1. The first house on your left is the **Munsell-Hillock** house, birthplace of publisher Joel Munsell. It was only one story when he was born in 1808.
2. The second house on your left is the five-bay **Wright-Heselton** house built in the mid-1700's. Owned by one family — the Wrights — longer than any other property in town, it is now an active market farm. Note the barns to the east for the cattle, crops, horses and carriages. The Wrights were important in the early settlements of the town; Benjamin was a famous fighter in the French and Indian Wars.
3. The **Northfield Grange** is the third oldest in the state. The building (before 1891) was adapted from the Woodbury and Lesure furniture store and undertaking parlor.
4. The Federal-style house built for merchant **Prior** (c. 1820) with added piazza on the south and west. As soon as a family could afford this summer convenience, one was added. The mountains to the east provide a backdrop for the Main Street home lots.
5. Notice the “**Siamese Twin**” house (c. 1855) as you pass. The right side was Dr. Mead's office in the 1900's. He is said to have added the connecting room as a convenience for his grandchildren.
6. The house at 47 Main Street (c. 1875) replaces an earlier one on the lot.
7. Next to it is a renovated center-chimney Colonial (c. 1795) owned by **Watriss, Dickinson and Dollard** families. The large arched base to the three-fireplaced-chimney is intact.
8. The two-apartment structure, once store and dance hall, was built c. 1877 by **Albert Stearns** at \$1.75 for a ten-hour day.
9. Gray shingles and a porch disguise a clapboard c. 1822 residence built for **Horace Wright**.
10. The imposing six-columned Greek Revival mansion at 33 Main Street was built by **George Stearns** in 1845 for his sister and her husband, sea captain Samuel Lane.
11. The early Victorian with Gothic detail was built by **Charles H. Stearns** in 1850 for his family. The single-story structure to the south served as an ice house at one time.
12. The **White-Field** Georgian or square Colonial was built in 1784 by the Rice brothers. It held the recruiting station for the “Sea Fencibles” in the War of 1812, also stage stop and post office. Members of the Field family have owned this house for over 100 years.

The Walking Tour Turns Here . . .

The walking tour turns here, at the corner of Maple Street. Once ten rods wide, Maple Street was the early route from the east into the settlement and fort across Main Street. If you wish to continue down Main Street, you will see a four-square Colonial, a mid-18th-century rectangular Colonial, two Greek Revivals, and the site of the first religious service. Continuing south on Rte. 63 brings you to "The Farms" (#13 on map) and Northeast Utilities' Recreational and Environmental Center (#14).

15. As you cross Main Street, you will be facing the Federal-style **Mattoon-Leonard** house with portico. The front section, built in 1816 by the Stearns builders, cost \$417.25. The back ell is of earlier date.

16. Built by the Stearns' for **Dr. Elijah Stratton** c. 1844. Partly burned in 1868, it was rebuilt by Albert Stearns and Samuel S. Holton. When Gov. Belcher came through Northfield from his conference with the Cagnawagas and other Indians at Deerfield and inspection of troops at Fort Dummer in 1735, he took refreshments with Zechariah Field in an earlier house on this site.

17. The columned **Stearns-Baker** 1843 cottage has palladium and dormer windows with south entry. This house served as model for similar Greek Revival houses in Northfield and vicinity. The house was built on a man-made knoll to set it off.

18. Built c. 1820 for **Elijah Mattoon**, later Judge Mattoon's home. The second-story sleeping porch is a 20th-century addition.

19. This is another **Stearns** family home, built by Albert and brothers for his family. The low rear section is said to have been from the ferry by the river.

20. The Stearns-built **Mattoon-Nicholson** 1828 house has the first gable to the street. Close inspection shows this new Greek Revival style was created by turning a traditional center-chimney form to face the yard, with the end to the street.

21, 22, & 23. On what was a single lot is now a large 1783 Georgian adaptation, a yellow 20th-century bungalow-style, and the old Webster store. The first store burned to the ground and was replaced c. 1879.

24. The columned **Stearns-Field** 1828 house at 66 Main Street was built by Sam Stearns for himself. The south bay window and porch are later additions.

25. In this c. 1830 house, **Ira Sanky**, composer of hymns and colleague of D.L. Moody, lived during the 1880's.

26. The present **First Parish Unitarian Church**, built in 1879, is adjacent to the site of the first church in Northfield. The original was "in the street," which was common land. Here cows, swine, and sheep ran free while the houses and people were fenced to protect the home gardens from the wandering beasts. The church holds a fine E and GG Hook organ #48, built in 1842. The town clock in the steeple is an 1871 Howard Company clock.

- 27.** On the opposite corner of Parker Avenue (once Depot Street) stands the **Webster Block** c. 1848, originally one-third the present size.
- 28.** **Caleb Lyman** is said to have built #76 Main Street c. 1801.
- 29.** The next house c. 1900 was moved to the location after an earlier house had burned. It serves as rectory for **St. Patrick's Church**, built in 1886.
- 30.** The 1840 **Murdock-DeRomoet** house is another Stearns-built structure. It is cited in their account books as the model for the Callender-Rogers 1846 house at 4 Main Street. The triangular pediment on the third floor has an ornamental blind, one of the new architectural details brought to Northfield by the Stearns builders.
- 31.** The **Timothy Swan** residence on this lot burned in 1978. It served as headquarters of the American Youth Hostel Association in the 1930's. In the 1970's it was the home of the commune Brotherhood of the Spirit, and will be, in the 1980's, a subsidized public housing complex.
- 32.** In 1871, the **Pomeroy-Abbott** Colonial Revival white house was built by Col. Pomeroy for his son.
- 33.** The large 1811 **Nevers-Lentz** house was constructed by the Stearns brothers. The contract shows it to have been built for \$600. The long rear ell was renovated when Northfield Mt. Hermon school used it as the residence for its presidents.
- 34.** The house just north of the elementary school was constructed in the 1900's from sections of two houses which were being moved to provide Robert Schell the land he wanted for his famous chateau.
- 35.** Next is the **Dickinson-Prescott** c. 1785 house. Modernization is evident in the elliptical fan and side lights at the front door, the Gothic details on the porch, and the two bay windows on the south facade. A Governors' Councillor and Navy Paymaster once lived here.
- 36.** The **Evans-O'Connell** house (1716; 1759) is a fine early Colonial house. Parts of this may be as early as 1716; porch additions were made c. 1759 and mid-1800's. J.H. Brigham's daguerreotype studio was here, and later a furniture store. One of Northfield's Tory sympathizers, Aaron Whitney, lived here.
- 37 & 38.** To the north of Pentecost Road, two small cottages were built in 1928 as a gift to the Northfield School for Girls. They served as temporary homes for Christian missionaries returning to the United States.
- 39.** Down the slope, the brown four-square Colonial was built c. 1793. The stone marker notes the Clary Fort which stood here in 1668 during the first settlement, and was rebuilt in 1722. Mill Brook (beyond) was the site of early industries, as noted by the stone wheel in front of the new post office.

The Walking Tour Turns South . . .

The walking tour turns south at this point. If you wish to explore further north, in East Northfield, you will find several early houses in "Alexander Land" including the Alexander-True 1776 house (#40), two brick, Federal-style homes (#41 & 42) built in the mid-1800's, and a number of Victorian

period structures (#43). This is an area of Northfield which expanded under the influence of the Moody religious conferences and the development of the Northfield Seminary.

The Northfield Mt. Hermon campus (#44) is approximately one-half mile. The campus has fine brick, stone and wood high-Victorian structures. Also in this area is the Moody Museum, Birthplace, and Homestead, and the Northfield Historical Society (#45). The Ridge (#46), a camp-cottage colony built over seventy years ago to house the Moody conference attendees, has more than seventy of these summer residences still in use.

For the rest of the Main Street tour, retrace your steps, crossing the street just north of the library.

47. This is another house c. 1865 moved to the site when Robert Schell built his chateau.

48. The **Dickinson Library** was given to the town in 1897 by descendants of the Dickinson family. The library is built of local granite. A carved-wood staircase leads to a room with skylight and painted ceiling.

49. Further south, past the Dutch Colonial reproduction, is the 19th-century **Dutton-DiBari** home built by the Stearns.

50. South of the garage is the one-room-wide Colonial **Belding-Spencer** house built in the mid-1700's. It has an added lean-to end.

51. The square house on the corner was built for **Dr. Blake**, physician on the old Constitution.

Now cross School Street and pass the fire station, once the site of the Congregational Church and, later, a public school.

52. Beyond the fire station is the **Hunt-Maxson** house c. 1765; 1798, commonly referred to as "The Beehive." In the 1800's, when it was the Academy of Useful Knowledge, it had porches on the first and second stories. Later The Northfield Institute, it has also served as Hunt's Tavern, a Temperance Hotel, Bronson Nursing Home, and Maxson Museum.

53. The green **Gothic Revival** house next door, c. 1846, was probably built for use by the Academy. It has gothic arch windows and blinds, two entrance porches with columns, and a large triangular pediment at the second floor.

54. The **Lyman-Reddy** interior was finished by the Stearns.

55. The **Mann Block** has been the home of many businesses. The present building c. 1898 is on the site of at least two taverns. Taverns served as post office, court room, news room, and community center.

The 5th Massachusetts Turnpike entered Northfield at Warwick Avenue. At different times a sign post, toll gate, and the Belcher monument (on the lawn of the Town Hall) stood in this intersection.

56. Across the avenue, the large four-square, hipped-roof **Pomeroy-Dahlman** house c. 1765 served as a model for others of this style. The modified Connecticut Valley doorway is typical of the period. At one time it was the Alexander home with blacksmith shop.