

# **ASHBY RECONNAISSANCE REPORT**

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## **FREEDOM'S WAY LANDSCAPE INVENTORY**

### **MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY PROGRAM**



**Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation**

**Freedom's Way Heritage Association**

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### **Cover Photographs**

View from Hardy Road (Wind Ridge Farm) Looking North  
Ashby Stock Farm  
First Parish Burial Ground

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Freedom's Way Heritage Association includes 37 Massachusetts communities that are linked by historic events that helped to shape America's democratic form of governance and the intellectual traditions that underpin American freedom, democracy, conservation and social justice. Freedom's Way communities extend from Arlington on the east to Winchendon on the west. They represent a wide range of cities and towns, each shaped by the relationship between nature and culture.

Heritage landscapes are special places created by human interaction with the natural environment that help define the character of a community and reflect its past. They are dynamic and evolving; they reflect the history of a community and provide a sense of place; they show the natural ecology that influenced land use patterns; and they often have scenic qualities. The wealth of landscapes is central to each community's character, yet heritage landscapes are vulnerable and ever changing. For this reason it is important to take the first steps towards their preservation by identifying those landscapes that are particularly valued by the community – a favorite local farm, a distinctive neighborhood or mill village, a unique natural feature or an important river corridor. To this end, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Freedom's Way Heritage Association (FWHA) have collaborated to bring the Heritage Landscape Inventory program (HLI) to communities in the Freedom's Way area. The primary goal of the program is to help communities identify a wide range of landscape resources, particularly those that are significant and unprotected. The focus is on landscapes that have not been identified in previous survey efforts in a given community. Another important goal of the program is to provide communities with strategies for preserving heritage landscapes.

The methodology for the Heritage Landscape Inventory program was developed in a pilot project conducted in southeast Massachusetts and refined in Essex County. It is outlined in the DCR publication *Reading the Land* which has provided guidance for the program since its inception. In summary, each participating community appoints a Local Project Coordinator (LPC) to assist the DCR-FWHA consulting team. The LPC organizes a heritage landscape identification meeting at which interested residents and town officials offer community input by identifying heritage landscapes. This meeting is followed by a fieldwork session including the consulting team and the LPC, often accompanied by other community members. This group visits the priority landscapes identified in the meeting and gathers information about the community. The final product is this Reconnaissance Report, prepared for each participating community. It outlines the history of the community; describes the priority heritage landscapes; discusses planning issues identified by the community; identifies planning tools available in the community; and concludes with preservation recommendations. A list of all of the heritage landscapes identified by the community is included in the Appendix.

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## ASHBY HISTORY

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Native American sites in Ashby have not been documented; yet there are known artifact findings (according to the history in the Open Space and Recreation Plan) and it is likely that Native Americans traveled along trails following Willard and Trapfall Brooks. European settlement in this hilly town near the New Hampshire border was later than most other Middlesex County towns. In 1767 Ashby was incorporated from parts of Ashburnham, Fitchburg and Townsend. At the time only 43 families were living here; that number rose substantially to 422 persons living in Ashby in 1775, for unidentified reasons. These first settlers traveled along roads that followed Native American trails. County Road to Main Street was an east-west route leading out to Watatic Pond. The first meetinghouse was constructed at the center between 1769 and 1774. Once the town center was determined with the meetinghouse and burial ground, northwest routes connected the center with New Hampshire along New Ipswich and Mason Roads.

While the first grist mill opened in 1750, the early economy was based largely on dispersed farms. Agriculture continued to be the mainstay of the local economy throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Connections with neighboring communities were augmented with the opening of the Ashby Turnpike in 1811 connecting Ashburnham through Ashby with Townsend where other roads converged. The connection with Fitchburg on Fitchburg State Road continued to be maintained and improved.

Only a modest number of mills, mostly at South Village, were established in Ashby and the population never saw the increase that other communities experienced during the Early Industrial Period. In fact, the population which had risen to 1,240 by 1830 had dropped to under 1,000 by 1870. The 19<sup>th</sup> century mills were wood-related businesses such as saw mills, wood turning, tub and pail production and clock making businesses, all of which augmented the mainstay of the economy – agriculture. The lack of railroad connections meant that products had to be transported to Fitchburg for rail shipment. Even the farms remained small, with dairy and orchard products used locally or sent to Fitchburg for local consumption there.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century businesses, including farming, declined in Ashby. Some road improvements included town roads that became part of the regional route numbering system so that Townsend Road, Main Street and West State Road became Route 119 and the roads connecting Fitchburg with New Hampshire – State and Greenville Roads – became Route 31.

A shift in population occurred from the 1940s to 1970 when Fitchburg mill workers came to live in Ashby so that the population more than doubled from 1,026 in 1940 to 2,274 by 1970. Many of the Fitchburg mills closed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the population growth stayed its course. At the same time Ashby's farm owners turned to developing equestrian centers, market gardens and Christmas tree farms. By the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century 2,845 people were living in Ashby.

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## **PRIORITY HERITAGE LANDSCAPES**

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Ashby's Heritage Landscape Identification meeting, attended by approximately 11 residents, some representing town boards and local non-profit organizations, was held on May 15, 2006. During the meeting residents compiled a lengthy list of the town's heritage landscapes, which is included in the Appendix. Once the comprehensive list was created, attendees were asked to articulate the value of each landscape and the issues relating to its preservation. Based on the information gathered, community members identified a group of priority landscapes to be visited by the consulting team during the fieldwork. Each of the priority landscapes is highly valued, contributes to community character and is not permanently protected or preserved.

These landscapes, which are listed alphabetically, represent a range of scales and types of resources from individual properties such as the Trapfall Bridge to transportation corridors such as Route 119. Some of the priority landscapes describe areas that have multiple layers. For example the town center includes features within it that are also individually recognized as heritage landscapes. Such layering shows the complexity and interdependence that are characteristic of most heritage landscapes. The descriptions and recommendations included here are an initial step in identifying resources valued by the community and suggesting action strategies.

### **Ashby Stock Farm**

Ashby's largest extant farm is the Ashby Stock Farm, known for a short period as the Middlesex Stock Farm. It has a history of raising livestock that has been sold regionally and nationally for many years. The present tenant, the Morgan Horse Organization, raises Morgan horses which are trained as dressage horses. The farm also has many acres of active hay fields.

The Stock Farm's 238 acres of hayfields, pastures and forest front on the north side of Main Street west of the town center. Pastures are marked by post and rail fencing surrounding the buildings which are just off the road accessed by a gravel driveway. There are three houses, a large New England barn with side sheds, other barns and a large new indoor riding facility. At the front of the property west of the driveway is a farm pond. Also on the property are two minor streams that are the headwaters for Trapfall Brook which is to the east and flows into Willard Brook. Caton Hill rises at the northern edge of the property forming a backdrop, where the owners have sited a large religious memorial overseeing the farm.

The property is well maintained presenting a clean orderly appearance. The farm draws visitors to Ashby who come to do business related to horses. Ashby's recently formed agricultural commission and its adoption of the Right-to-Farm Bylaw recognizes the value of such a business to the local economy and community character.

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## ***Recommendations***

This property has not been documented on MHC forms, probably because only a few historic elements remain. It is Ashby's largest working farm and its future has a significant impact on local scenic character. Therefore while the Historical Commission is responsible for documentation, the Conservation Commission and the Agricultural Commission may be in the best position to discuss the ongoing vitality of the property with owners and to consider permanent protection strategies.

- Document the farm on an MHC Area Form.
- Work with property owner to explore potential eligibility for agricultural preservation restrictions or interest in conservation restrictions on part of the property.

## **Cemeteries**

Ashby has three historic cemeteries that were selected as priority heritage landscapes by residents, due in part to some concerns about each.

***Ashby First Parish Burial Ground*** is also referred to as the Old Burial Ground as it was established on the Common in 1767 at the time the town was incorporated. This less than two-acre burial ground is located just behind the First Parish Church and is bordered by New Ipswich Road on the east side where a brick receiving tomb is located at the road edge. The church, its parking area and the carriage sheds form the southern edge, an undeveloped area is to the west, and a private dwelling is just over a low stone wall to the north. The west side also has a low dry-laid stone wall bordering the burial ground. There are a few mature deciduous trees within the burial ground and many around the edges.

Headstones are primarily slate with distinctive 18<sup>th</sup> century motifs, but the cemetery also includes later marble and granite headstones and monuments. They are arranged in loosely formed rows. In the northwest corner is the marker of a black Revolutionary War veteran, Prince Estabrook, who is reported to have been wounded at the Battle of Lexington. He was originally buried outside the burial ground wall but re-interred inside the wall in the recent past.

This burial ground is listed in the State Register of Historic Places as part of the Ashby Historic District (a local historic district) which includes the Common and surrounding resources. Due to this listing it is eligible for certain grant programs. Issues include broken and leaning stones, trees in need of maintenance and a receiving tomb that would benefit from restoration.

***Glenwood Cemetery*** is the newest of Ashby's burial grounds – it was established in 1867, just after the Civil War. The large (nearly 12-acres) trapezoidal parcel is set back from the surrounding roads and framed by mature trees on three sides (east, west and south). The entrance is on the north side approached via a long narrow driveway from Main Street. This entrance is marked by granite piers,

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each in a cruciform shape which announces the cemetery name and memorials. There is no gate between these piers. Extending on each side of the piers is a row of granite posts once connected by iron rails forming a fence and a row of trees lines this north boundary just inside the granite posts. To the right of and in front of the entrance piers is a large mown meadow that also belongs to the cemetery but has not yet been used for burials. A narrow tributary of Trapfall Brook flows along the northwest tip of the property, forming a modest sized wetland.

Within the grounds, circulation paths are dirt with a center grassy strip and tend to be laid out in a rectilinear plan. Some flowering shrubs are scattered about the cemetery but for the most part the plant material is limited to the edges of the parcel. Stones, most of granite or marble, are arranged in rows and in family lots, some of which are edged with granite curbing. There are some obelisks and zinc monuments marking the center of some of these lots. On the west side of the meadow described above there is a small maintenance shed that belongs to the cemetery.



Issues noted for Glenwood Cemetery are the need for stone repairs; the need to map and plan a new section; and the question of whether or not to open up the view from South Road which would require the removal of some of the vegetation on the west side of the cemetery.

**West Cemetery** is an old family burial ground that was started during the Revolutionary War. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was used by the many Finnish families living in the western part of Ashby. The narrow rectangular two acre-acre lot fronts on West Road where a white board fence lines the road. An opening is located near the middle. Along the other edges there are tall pine trees and some arborvitae.

The ground is covered with moss, grass and low wildflowers. Stones are loosely arranged in rows and include slate, marble and granite in varying conditions. Many have toppled off their bases or are leaning to an unsafe degree. Some families are clustered together in family lots while other graves are located in individual plots.



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### ***Recommendations***

The primary issue at all three cemeteries is stone conservation, as all have stones that have fallen, are leaning or are broken. Some of these represent a safety hazard to cemetery users. The DCR publication *Preservation Guidelines for Municipally Owned Historic Burial Grounds and Cemeteries* provides guidance on developing preservation plans for burial grounds, including identification and evaluation of the resources as well as preservation strategies. Using this guide the Ashby Historical Commission and Cemetery Commission working together should:

- Document the cemeteries on MHC inventory forms and evaluate for National Register eligibility. Only the Ashby First Parish Burial Ground has been documented; however it can use substantial updating through the preparation of a new form.
- Prepare a National Register district nomination for the Ashby Common Local Historic District that would include the Ashby First Parish Burial Ground as a contributing element. Consult with the MHC for guidance.
- Develop a preservation and management plan for each town-owned burial ground taking into consideration repair of stone markers, stone walls and fencing related to cemeteries, removal of invasive growth and ongoing maintenance of plant material. MHC and DCR funding programs, when available, can help finance plans and preservation work in burial grounds.

### **Gazebo on the Common**

The Common is a large triangular grassy area near the top of the hill at Ashby Center. On the Common are handsome ash and maple trees providing shade and a bucolic setting for the historic hexagonal gazebo off set from the center of the Common. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century fanciful structure has recently been restored. It features screening around the base, turned posts with turned spindle brackets, decorative spindle screening around the cornice of the roof, a railing that forms the backs of benches around the edge of the gazebo and a decorative finial on top. Stairs approach the deck of the gazebo on the northeast side. The importance of the gazebo is its context. It is a focal point of the center of Ashby and its recent restoration accentuates the spot.

### ***Recommendations***

The Historical Commission is responsible for documentation of historic resources and is encouraged to use this information to educate the public and form programs in schools.

- Document the Ashby Common gazebo on an MHC survey F form used to document structures.

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- Prepare a National Register district nomination for the Ashby Common Historic District that would include this resource as a contributing element of the district.
  - Develop walking tour brochure highlighting the many resources around the Common that tell the story of Ashby's development.



### **Jewett Hill Caves**

Some refer to these large rock outcroppings as the “Indian Caves” which are part of Ashby's oral tradition about the town's Native American heritage. They are located in the woods on Jewett Hill near West Road. Large slabs of rock form overhangs, which can be used as shelters. It has been reported that some artifacts have been found in the vicinity of these natural occurring caves.

### ***Recommendations***

Ashby has no documented Native American sites. The Historical Commission should consult with the MHC to receive guidance on learning more about archaeological surveys.

- Document the rock overhangs – caves – using the expertise of a professional archaeologist. The most appropriate approach would be to begin with a comprehensive reconnaissance archaeological survey as stated under **Inventory** of the General Preservation Planning Recommendation section of this report.

### **Loveland Grist and Saw Mills**

Just north of the outlet of Ashby Reservoir is a small mill village known as South Village. Here Ephraim Hayward established a gristmill in 1800. At the outlet of the reservoir where the water spills into Willard Brook are the two mill buildings – grist and saw – and some mill housing on Erickson and Valley Roads. The mill complex is owned by the Middlesex County Foundation and is operated as Camp

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Middlesex, a 4-H camp providing recreational and educational uses. This site is unique in that so much of the early mills (both saw and grist) is preserved including the gear system within the sawmill building. The water falls from the spillway rushing between the two mills; the gristmill is on the west side of the brook; the sawmill is on the east side; and they are connected by a covered walkway or bridge high over the brook.



The two-story gristmill with single-story attached shed rises above the brook on a high stone foundation, and is believed to be Hayward's 1800 mill building. A rebuilt wood deck bridge leads across the spillway to the east side of the brook where the sawmill building is located as well as the camp grounds. The mill structure with interior gear system in place is built into the slope of the bank and is on a low stone foundation at the brook's shoreline. Parts of the mill buildings have recently been re-shingled and some of the 9/6 and 6/6 windows on the gristmill have been replaced.

This mill complex had a number of operators in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ending with William O. Loveland for whom the mill is named. Besides running the sawmill here, he equipped the gristmill with generating equipment so that he was able produce the electric lighting for the town until he closed the mills in the 1920s. The Middlesex County Foundation has owned the property since ca. 1941. Clearly, the owner has been respectful of the value and has maintained the buildings. The historical and architectural significance of this complex are compelling reasons to have it high on the list of heritage landscapes.

### ***Recommendations***

The Ashby Historical Commission is responsible for identification and evaluation of historic resources and can facilitate in preservation efforts. Updating of documentation and pursuing National Register listing for this mill complex would be appropriate in preparing for other preservation strategies.

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Updated survey work will help reveal the scope of a potential National Register district – whether just the mill complex or the mill complex and associated housing at South Village. Consultation with the MHC staff is recommended

- Update MHC survey forms for mill complex and complete new forms for housing in area.
- Complete a National Register nomination for mill complex or district of South Village after seeking guidance from and evaluation by the MHC.
- Assist owners in developing a long range master plan for the property including identifying funding sources such as the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) to assist in stabilizing buildings when necessary.

### **Route 119**

This two-lane road winds through Willard Brook State Park nearly parallel to Willard Brook and is known as Townsend Road. West of the park Route 119 jogs left onto Route 31 and then right onto Main Street which heads up the long gradual hill to Ashby Center. From here Route 119 continues as Main Street across Ashby to West State Road where it skirts around the edge of the Ashby Wildlife Management Area before crossing Watatic Pond and leading into Ashburnham.

Although a numbered road, Route 119 is scenic with all aspects of Ashby's colorful landscapes. In the state forest there are views of the brook, the falls, camp grounds and forested areas with rock outcroppings. Wooded areas slope down to the road edge that climbs the hill to Ashby Common. Lining the road in the village center are many significant historic houses, the library, the Common with gazebo, elegant First Parish Church and the large Colonial Revival town hall (former school). After passing through the center the road opens to pastoral views across meadows and tilled fields. Before crossing into Ashburnham it becomes West State Road, passes along a ridge and descends to cross Watatic Pond.

### ***Recommendations***

Route 119 is scenic and a major character defining feature of the town. Yet it is not protected and is subject to widening and potential insensitive treatment of edges including loss of historic fabric. Because the road is a numbered route it is not eligible for designation under the Scenic Roads Bylaw. The Historical Commission is responsible for documenting historic resources.

- Complete MHC survey forms for resources along Route 119 that have not been documented.
- Complete National Register nomination for Ashby Common area and be sure to describe history of road as well as present day importance.



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- Consider extending the local historic district to include houses (not already included) along the hill that ascends to Ashby Common from the east.
  - Work with local highway department to develop informal standards for caring for this numbered route which has important scenic qualities.

### **Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge**

The significance of the 1860 Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge was recognized in 1978 when plans to reconstruct Route 31/Greenville Road led to a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Through this determination the bridge was saved and the highway was rerouted slightly to the east crossing Trapfall Brook via a modern bridge.

The Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge is a granite block bridge arching over the Trapfall Brook adjacent to Route 31/Greenville Road. The path of the old road, now a walking trail, is carried over the brook by this intact bridge. The edge of the road/path drops off to the brook where the full structural feat of this bridge can be appreciated. Although the area along the edge of the brook is overgrown with small trees and shrubs, one can see that each granite block of the 1860 bridge is in place.



### ***Recommendations***

The Historical Commission is the local advocate for historic resources. The documentation for this bridge could be updated and supporting documentation necessary for actually listing in the National Register could be used to generate an interesting brochure about the history of the bridge and connecting Ashby with Fitchburg to the south and New Hampshire to the north. Providing access to view the bridge will require cooperation with Mass Highway and the Conservation Commission.

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- Update MHC survey form if necessary and complete National Register nomination.
  - Work with Mass Highway and Conservation Commission to use old roadbed for a trail and to clear an area to access brook. Remove small trees at edge of brook, particularly those growing close to the bridge that may eventually dislodge granite blocks.
  - Prepare a walking brochure telling about the bridge and its historical meaning to the town.

## **CRITICAL CONCERNS**

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In addition to the priority landscapes listed in the previous section, residents also identified critical concerns related to heritage landscapes and community character. These are town-wide issues that are linked to a range or category of heritage landscapes, not to a particular place. They are listed in alphabetical order. Community members also expressed interest in learning about preservation tools and strategies that have been effective in other Massachusetts communities and in identifying sources for preservation funding.

### **Agriculture**

The path of agriculture in Ashby has left a mark on the landscape, a mark that residents hope will be indelible because it defines the character of the community. Large dairy farms and apple orchards covered Ashby's hills well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Presently there are a number of farms that specialize in horse raising and other related equestrian recreation, market gardening and raising Christmas trees. Preservation of the farms including the farming activities is preservation of Ashby's character. Change in ownership of key farms may require partnerships and multiple approaches to protect these heritage landscapes. Refer to **Agricultural Landscapes** in General Preservation Planning Recommendations section of this report.

### **Architecture**

Many fine examples of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture line Ashby's roads, particularly at the center. Most are wood frame Georgian, Federal or Greek Revival structures dating from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are a few mid- to late 19<sup>th</sup>-century dwellings displaying the Second Empire and Italianate styles. Institutional buildings range from the quintessential meetinghouse on the Common to the Classical Revival library and the Lyman Public School (now the Town Hall). There is a group of brick Federal houses that are reported to be two brick layers thick laid up in Flemish bond. The condition of many of these properties is good and they clearly contribute to the scenic character of the roads as well as the historical development of the community. Appreciation of the architectural variety within the town will be

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enhanced by thorough documentation that can also to expand residents knowledge of their town.



### **Scenic Roads**

As in so many rural communities, roads are the public face of Ashby, the threads that tie the community together and the corridors from which the landscape is viewed. Ashby has been fortunate to retain the traditional character of its rural roadways. Many still reflect their original alignment, width and corridor characteristics, with extant stone walls, farm fences and roadside trees. The landscape of hills and brooks, of the historic village center and the rural agricultural fields is appreciated from these roads crisscrossing through Ashby. This includes the two numbered routes, particularly Route 119 which is one of the most picturesque roads as it captures each type of heritage landscape along its east-west route through Ashby. The 2004 *Community Development Plan* recommended adoption of a scenic roads bylaw, which the town did; however only the mechanism was established; no roads were designated. This is an important next step which is outlined under **Scenic Roads** in the General Preservation Planning Recommendations section of this report.

## **EXISTING RESOURCE DOCUMENTATION AND PLANNING TOOLS**

Ashby already has important planning tools in place to document current conditions within the town; identify issues of concern to town residents; and develop strategies for action. This section of the Reconnaissance Report identifies some of the existing planning documents and tools that provide information relevant to the Heritage Landscape Inventory program.

### **Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets**

The Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC) Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets is a statewide list that identifies significant historic

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resources throughout the Commonwealth. In order to be included in the inventory, a property must be documented on an MHC inventory form, which is then entered into the MHC database. This searchable database, known as MACRIS, is now available online at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc>.

According to the MHC, Ashby's inventory documents about 75 historic resources ranging from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the survey work was completed in the 1970s.

Ashby has no documented ancient Native American sites and only seven documented historic archaeological sites. Due to the known information about nearby communities, it is likely that there is high archaeology potential in this town.

### **State and National Registers of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places is the official federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that have been determined significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. Ashby has no properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR); however there are two determinations of eligibility (DOE): Locke's Mill Complex (also known as Loveland Mills) and the Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge. All National Register listings and DOEs are automatically listed in the State Register of Historic Places. The Ashby Historic District at the Town Common is a local historic district which also is listed in the State Register. One property within this district, the Ashby Town Horse and Carriage Shed, is protected by a preservation restriction drawn up in accordance with MGL Chapter 184, Sections 31-33. A preservation restriction (PR) runs with the deed and is one of the strongest preservation strategies available. All properties that have preservation restrictions filed under the state statute are automatically listed in the State Register.

### **Planning Documents and Tools**

The *Ashby Open Space and Recreation Plan* was completed by a committee of residents in 1999 to guide the town into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The goals are broad but consistent with heritage landscape preservation such as preserving rural character by promoting farming strategies, protecting the town center and preserving other historic sites. In 2004, the town developed the *Community Development Plan* in response to the 2000 Executive Order 418. Some of these recommended preservation strategies have been adopted as described below.

As noted in the State Register section above, Ashby adopted a local historic district bylaw and designated the Town Common area as a small 12-resource district in 1997. The Ashby Local Historic District Bylaw regulates changes made to the exterior architectural features of structures located in the Ashby Historic District.



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Other preservation-related strategies adopted as a result of recommendations in the Community Development Plan include the Scenic Roads Bylaw, Agricultural Commission and the Right-to-Farm Bylaw. The Scenic Roads Bylaw regulates the removal of trees and stone walls within the right-of-way; however the town adopted its Scenic Roads Bylaw, which only states the process of designating and regulating scenic roads; it does not designate any roads as scenic.

Ashby's Zoning Bylaw has at least two sections that guide development in a way that is consistent with preservation of heritage landscapes: the Open Space Development Bylaw and the Residential/Agricultural Bylaw. The Open Space Development Bylaw encourages its use when the applicant demonstrates that such a subdivision would be a better use of the land than conventional subdivision. In addition the town has a Rate of Development Bylaw limiting the total number of residential building permits in each calendar year to 20 with no more than three per owner/land parcel.

### **GENERAL PRESERVATION PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Recommendations pertaining to priority heritage landscapes can be found beginning on page 3. This section of the Reconnaissance Report offers more general recommendations relevant to preserving the character of the community that would be applicable to a wide range of community resources.

Ashby residents place high value on the community's strong sense of place, which is created by its varied natural features and land use patterns that made use of the fertile land. The town has already taken measures to document and evaluate its most significant buildings and natural areas. It is now looking beyond the traditional resources to the landscapes, streetscapes, rural roads and other natural and cultural assets that define the overall fabric of the community. Like most communities in the region Ashby is facing pressures for change that threaten land-based uses and natural resources. Special places within the community that were once taken for granted are now more vulnerable than ever to change.

Preservation planning is a three-step process: **identification, evaluation and protection**. Four useful documents to consult before beginning to implement preservation strategies are:

- Department of Conservation and Recreation, *Reading the Land*
- Freedom's Way Heritage Association, *Feasibility Study*
- Massachusetts Historical Commission, *Survey Manual*
- Massachusetts Historical Commission, *Preservation through Bylaws and Ordinances*

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Recommendations that apply to a broad range of resources are discussed below. These recommendations are listed in the order in which they are most logically addressed when applying the three-step preservation planning process as described above. Thus the goal will be to (1) identify, (2) evaluate, (3) protect.

### **Inventory of Heritage Landscapes**

The vital first step in developing preservation strategies for heritage landscapes is to record information about the resources on MHC inventory forms. One cannot advocate for something unless one knows precisely what it is – the physical characteristics and the historical development. The resources discussed in this Reconnaissance Report that have not been documented should be included in the next inventory project. Thus, using the Massachusetts Historical Commission survey methodology:

- Compile a list of resources that are under-represented or not sufficiently documented, beginning with heritage landscapes.
- Document unprotected resources first, beginning with the most threatened resources.
- Make sure to document secondary features on rural, agricultural and residential properties, such as outbuildings, stone walls and landscape elements.
- Record a wide range of historic resources including landscape features and industrial resources.
- Conduct a community-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey to identify patterns of ancient Native American and historic occupation and to identify known and probable locations of archaeological resources associated with these patterns. Known and potential ancient Native American and historic archaeological sites should be documented in the field for evidence of their cultural association and/or integrity. All survey work should be completed by a professional archaeologist who meets the professional qualifications (950 CMR 70.01) outlined in the State Archaeologist Permit Regulations (950 CMR 70.00). The Inventory of Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth contains sensitive information about archaeological sites. The inventory is confidential; it is not a public record (G.L. c. 9, ss. 26A (1)). Care should be taken to keep archaeological site information in a secure location with restricted access. Refer to the MHC article "Community-Wide Archaeological Surveys" which appeared in the Preservation Advocate, Fall 2005 which can be found at the following MHC link:<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/pafall05.pdf>

### **National Register Program**

Survey work will require an evaluation as to whether resources meet the qualifications for National Register listing. Because Ashby has no properties

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listed in the National Register the town should consider reviewing properties surveyed in the past for National Register eligibility as well as evaluating newly recorded properties. Using the information generated in the survey work and the accompanying National Register evaluation, adopt a National Register program for Ashby.

- Develop a National Register listing plan, taking into consideration a property's integrity and vulnerability. Properties that are in need of recognition in order to advance preservation strategies should be given priority.
- Consider potential National Register district nominations for Ashby Common, which is the local historic district, and for the Loveland Mills area (South Village).

### **Village and Rural Neighborhood Character**

Nearly all preservation strategies address village and neighborhood character in some manner. As described above, thorough documentation on MHC inventory forms is an important first step in the preservation planning process, followed by National Register listing where appropriate. One of three traditional preservation strategies has been adopted by Ashby: a local historic district bylaw (in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C). Other traditional strategies are a demolition delay bylaw and a neighborhood architectural conservation district bylaw and designation.

- **Demolition delay bylaws** provides a time period in which towns can explore alternatives to demolition. The Ashby Historical Commission should work with MHC staff to develop a bylaw that would best suit Ashby's needs and should work with other town groups to publicize the advantages of a demolition delay bylaw to the community. Adoption of a demolition delay bylaw requires a majority vote of Town Meeting.
- **Local historic districts**, adopted through a local initiative, recognize special areas within a community where the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places are preserved and protected by the designation. As Ashby knows local historic district designation and regulation is the strongest form of protection for the preservation of historic resources. The existing district and bylaw were adopted by a 2/3 vote of Town Meeting and are administered by a district commission appointed by the Board of Selectmen.
- **Neighborhood architectural conservation districts** also are local initiatives that recognize special areas within a community where the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places are preserved and protected. They are less restrictive than local historic districts but still embrace neighborhood character. Neighborhood architectural conservation district designation is appropriate for residential neighborhoods that may have less integrity and where more flexibility is needed.

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## **Agricultural Landscapes**

Preservation of agricultural landscapes means preservation of the farming activities, particularly in Ashby where farms are integral to the community's past and present. It is important to know what the features of these agricultural landscapes are and which features the community treasures in order to make a case for preservation of these farms. As Ashby has already experienced by establishing an agricultural commission and adopting a right-to-farm bylaw, some preservation tools are available that can assist communities in preserving the actual farming activities even if only a few farms remain. Others are tools to preserve the landscape when a farm is sold, such as Ashby's Open Space Development Bylaw which essentially is a cluster bylaw. The town may want to consider strategies that support farming activities.

- Document all farms, particularly those that are not represented in Ashby's inventory of historic resource, using MHC survey forms.
- Develop partnerships to raise funds to purchase development rights on farms or to assist farmers in the restoration of historic farm buildings for which the owner would be required to donate a preservation restriction (PR).
- Continue public-private partnerships to preserve farm land through purchase of conservation restrictions (CRs) or agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs).

## **Scenic Roads**

Scenic roads are an integral part of the historic fabric of the community. They are highly valued by Ashby residents and visitors alike and were listed as a critical issue. Roads must also accommodate modern transportation needs and decisions regarding roadways are often made with travel requirements as the only consideration. Ashby already has adopted the Scenic Roads Act (MGL Chapter 40-15C); however no roads have been designated. Such designations would require review and approval for the removal of trees and stone walls that are within the right-of-way on designated roads. In addition to roadway issues, much of what we value about scenic roads – the stone walls, views across open fields – is not within the public right-of-way. The preservation and protection of scenic roads therefore requires more than one approach.

- Complete an inventory with descriptions and photo documentation of each of the roads in Ashby including the character defining features that should be retained.
- Amend the Scenic Roads Bylaw by designating roads that meet the criteria already laid out in the bylaw. Consider adding other design criteria such as a provision allowing only one driveway cut per property on scenic roads. Coordinate procedures between Highway Department and Planning Board.

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- Consider a scenic overlay district which may provide a no-disturb buffer on private property bordering on scenic roads or adopt flexible zoning standards to protect certain views. (The Ashby Open Space Development Bylaw approaches this technique in purpose; some changes in the flexible standards may be considered after examining the intent of the implementation of the bylaw and in concert with preservation of these heritage landscapes.) Such bylaws also could be written to apply to the numbered routes, which are not protected under the Scenic Roads Bylaw.
  - Develop policies and implementation standards for road maintenance and reconstruction, including bridge reconstructions, which address the scenic and historic characteristics while also addressing safety. This is an important public process in which the community may have to accept responsibility for certain costs to implement standards that are not acceptable to projects funded by Massachusetts Highway Department. Such standards should have a section addressing the way in which the local Highway Department maintains roads, for example requiring a public hearing if any additional pavement is to be added to a town road during reconstruction or repair. Policies can be adopted by local boards having jurisdiction over roads, or can be adopted at Town Meeting through a bylaw. In developing policies consider factors such as road width, clearing of shoulders, walking paths, posted speeds. A delicate balance is required.

### **Funding of Preservation Projects**

Funding for preservation projects is an important aspect of implementing preservation strategies. Both the MHC and DCR have had funding programs to assist communities in preservation related issues including:

- **Survey and Planning Grants**, administered by the MHC, support survey, National Register and preservation planning work.
- The **Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF)**, administered by the MHC, funds restoration and rehabilitation projects.
- The **Historic Landscape Preservation Grant Program (HLPGP)**, administered by DCR, funds planning, rehabilitation, education and stewardship projects focused on historic landscapes, including cemeteries.

Funding for state programs varies from year to year. When planning Ashby's heritage landscape inventory program, contact relevant agencies to determine whether funding is available.

Towns that have adopted the **Community Preservation Act (CPA)** find it to be an excellent funding source for many heritage landscape projects; however Ashby first would have to adopt the Act. While tricky to pass in lean economic times, the number and types of projects that are benefiting across the Commonwealth makes the CPA worthy of consideration. Ashby projects eligible for CPA funding would include MHC inventory, National Register nominations,

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cemetery preservation, open space acquisition and preservation and restoration of public buildings. The CPA (M.G.L. Chapter 44B) establishes a mechanism by which cities and towns can develop a fund dedicated to historic preservation, open space and affordable housing. Local funds are collected through a .5% to 3% surcharge on each annual real estate tax bill. At the state level, the Commonwealth has established a dedicated fund which is used to match the municipality's collections under the CPA. The amount of the surcharge is determined as a ballot question proposed at a city election.

Adoption of the Community Preservation Act, by a majority vote on a ballot question, fosters **partnerships** among historic preservationists, conservationists and affordable housing advocates. At least 10% of the funds must be used to preserve historic resources; at least 10% must be used to protect open space; and at least 10% must be used to advance affordable housing. The remaining 70% must be used for one of these three uses as well as recreational needs and can be distributed in varying proportions depending upon the projects that the city believes are appropriate and beneficial to the municipality. Additional information about the CPA can be found at [www.communitypreservation.org](http://www.communitypreservation.org).

Towns, like Ashby, which have a local historic district bylaw, may apply for **Certified Local Government** (CLG) status which is granted by the National Park Service (NPS) through the MHC. At least 10% of the MHC's yearly federal funding allocation is distributed to CLG communities through Survey and Planning matching grants. To become a CLG, the town completes an application; after being accepted as a CLG, it files a report yearly on the status of applications, meetings, and decisions; in return the town may apply for the matching grant funding that the MHC awards competitively to CLGs annually. Presently 18 cities and towns are CLGs in Massachusetts.

## CONCLUSION

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The Ashby Reconnaissance Report is a critical tool in starting to identify the rich and diverse heritage landscapes in Ashby and in beginning to think about preservation strategies. Ashby will have to determine the best way to implement the recommendations discussed above. One approach that might help Ashby begin the process is to form a Heritage Landscape Committee, as described in *Reading the Land*.

Landscapes identified in this report, especially the priority landscapes, will typically need further documentation on MHC inventory forms. The documentation in turn can be used in publicity efforts to build consensus and gather public support for their preservation. Implementation of recommendations will require a concerted effort of and partnerships among municipal boards and agencies, local non-profit organizations, and state agencies and commissions.

Distribution of this Reconnaissance Report to the municipal land use boards and commissions will assist in making this one of the planning documents that guides Ashby in preserving important features of the community's character. The

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recommended tasks will require cooperation and coordination among boards and commissions, particularly Ashby's Historical Commission, Historic District Commission, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Cemetery Commission and Agricultural Commission. It also is advisable to present this information to the Board of Selectmen, which was the applicant to the Heritage Landscape Inventory program on behalf of the town. Finally distribution of the report to the Historical Society, neighborhood associations, and any other preservation minded organizations will broaden the audience and assist in gathering interest and support for Ashby's heritage landscapes.

This list was generated by local participants at the Heritage Landscape Identification Meeting held in Ashby on May 15, 2006 and the follow-up fieldwork on May 23, 2006. **There are undoubtedly other heritage landscapes that were not identified at the HLI meeting noted above.** The chart has two columns, the names and locations of resources are in the first; notes about resources are in the second. Landscapes are grouped by land use category. Abbreviations used are listed below.

CR = Conservation Restriction  
NR = National Register  
\* = Priority Landscape  
+ = Part of a Priority Landscape

Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program  
Ashby Reconnaissance Report



<b><i>Orchards</i></b>	Five orchards covering over 200 acres of land owned by Fitzgeralds, Saaris, Quatralles and Gullivers.
<b><i>Packard Farm</i></b> 1342 Richardson Rd.	Horses and cows.
<b><i>Pernaas Christmas Tree Farm</i></b> South Rd.	The Christmas tree for the USS Constitution is cut here each year. Also run sugar maple business.
<b><i>Three Corners Farm</i></b> Old Northfield Rd.	Organic vegetables, seasonal farmstand with a 19 <sup>th</sup> Cape and medium sized barn.
<b><i>Wind Ridge Farm</i></b> 66 Hardy Rd.	Early 19 <sup>th</sup> century Georgian house with barn foundation. A view of Mt. Watatic from here.
<b>Archaeological</b>	
<b><i>Caves on Jewett Hill *</i></b>	Often referred to as the Indian Caves these features are on Jewett Hill near West Road on private property. Residents expressed interest in determining historic uses and desire to prove or dispel Native American tie to caves.
<b>Burial Grounds and Cemeteries</b>	
<b><i>Ashby First Parish Church Burial Ground *</i></b> Main St.	Established in 1767 on Common and referred to as Old Burial Ground. Prince Estabrook, a black soldier wounded at Lexington, is buried here. The stones in this burial ground are in poor repair.
<b><i>Glenwood Cemetery *</i></b> Rt. 119	Established in 1867.
<b><i>West Cemetery *</i></b> West Rd.	Revolutionary War cemetery and later a Finnish cemetery next to Allen's Field.
<b>Civic / Center</b>	
<b><i>Ashby Town Common</i></b>	LHD. Around the Common there are a number of key structures including First Parish Church (Asher Benjamin design with Paul Revere factory bell, 1809), sheds, foundation of old hearse house, the Congregational Church (1800), Old Burial Ground, the Free Public Library (1901), Grange Hall, Engine House #1 (now Historical Society) and private houses such as Wyman Tavern (ca.1795).
<b><i>Lyman Building</i></b> 895 Main St.	This Colonial Revival building was a school housing all 12 grades, then the High School and now the Town Offices and Library.

<b>Industrial</b>	
<b><i>Carr's Mill Dam Remnants</i></b> Valley Rd.	Only mill foundations remain at this site.
<b><i>Loveland Gristmill and Sawmill *</i></b> South & Erikson Rds.	4-H facility at the old Loveland Grist and Saw Mill on Willard Brook at Mill Village. The well preserved mill is at the outlet of Ashby Reservoir. Some remnants of mill parts including building and gears are extant. Mills and mill housing – area also called South Village or Mill Village. Now the mill buildings and surrounding land is owned by Camp Middlesex. See Institutional: Camp Middlesex.
<b>Institutional</b>	
<b><i>Camp Lapham</i></b> South Rd.	This camp is on the shore of the Ashby Reservoir with 88 acres of upland and wetlands and a significant length of frontage on the reservoir.
<b><i>Camp Middlesex *</i></b> 1031 Erikson Rd.	The 4-H camp comprises 75 acres of rolling hills and lowland along the Willard Brook and abuts Willard Brook State Park. It is at the site of the old Loveland Mills. See Industrial: Loveland Gristmill and Sawmill.
<b>Natural</b>	
<b><i>Heritage Trees</i></b> 131 West Rd.	On private property.
<b>Open Space /Parks</b>	
<b><i>Blood Hill</i></b>	Open space with good vistas. Used to be known as Nemoset (a Native American name). Much of it is the 170-acre Wiita Conservation Land. See Draft Forest Management Plan.
<b><i>Caton Hill</i></b>	Near center. Relatively open with agricultural land. Can see to Boston from its summit. Caton Hill is the backdrop (north side) and partially owned by Ashby Stock Farm owners.
<b><i>Hills of Ashby</i></b>	Blood Hill, Caton Hill (near center), Fort Hill, Jones Hill, Jewell Hill, Jewett Hill (West Street), Juniper Hill, Mount Watatic, Rattlesnake Hill and Spring Hill.
<b><i>Lyman Fields</i></b> South Rd.	Abutting West Cemetery these hayfields are important open space.
<b><i>Mount Watatic</i></b>	Summit (which is 1,820 feet) and one side of the mountain are in Ashburnham. It is the highest part of the Mid-State Trail (constructed in 1927 linking Rhode Island and New Hampshire through this region of Massachusetts). The pasture land on the mountain was used as grazing land in the late 19 <sup>th</sup> and early 20 <sup>th</sup> century when farmers of Concord and Lexington drove their herds out here for summer pasturage. In the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century it also was known as prime blueberry picking area. There was a fire tower on top. A ski area was operated from the 1960s to 1980s.

<b><i>Wapack Trail</i></b>	Leads from foot of Mount Watatic (Ashby) to Peterborough, New Hampshire.
<b><i>Willard Brook State Forest</i></b>	Established in 1930, modeled after Mohawk Trail State Forest with a recreational drive and foot trails along the brook. Owned by the Commonwealth comprising over 2,500 acres of park land in Ashby (1,880 acres) and Townsend. Land along the banks as well as the Lower Willard Brook and Trapfall Brook are protected by park ownership. Bridge and dam within forest. There was a through road over the dam (Hosmer Road) which was discontinued about 10 to 15 years ago. There were cabins that had been built by the CCC in 1934 which were demolished in 1989 after a fire.
<b>Residential/Neighborhood</b>	
<b><i>Brick 19<sup>th</sup> Century Dwellings</i></b>	A group of 4 or 5 double layer brick houses (walls are two bricks thick) laid up in Flemish Bond. Some oral tradition states that some of the structural members are ship masts, which in fact was a product of one of the Ashby mills.
<b><i>Stone's Tavern</i></b> Wheeler Rd.	The Captain Samuel Stone Tavern is reported to be the oldest house in Ashby, which started as a tavern. Today it is referred to locally as Ken Johnson's House.
<b>Transportation</b>	
<b><i>Jewett Hill Road</i></b>	Scenic road with dramatic regional views.
<b><i>Keystone Bridge</i></b>	This keystone bridge is located upstream from the Rt. 119/31 crossing over Willard Brook. The bridge carries Valley Road over the brook; a section of Valley Road that is no longer open to vehicular traffic.
<b><i>Route 119 *</i></b>	Scenic numbered route – particularly the part that passes through Willard Brook State Forest.
<b><i>Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge *</i></b> Rt. 31	NR DOE. This bridge carried Rt. 31 over Trapfall Brook, until reconstruction project which added a new bridge adjacent to the historic bridge. It is located on Rt. 31 just south of Foster Road on the west side. The Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge remains although is no longer used. This bridge is in disrepair with grass growing through it.
<b><i>Valley Road</i></b>	Connected Ashby's South Village to Fitchburg. At the head of the road where it now is closed off there are brick buildings and farther along the part that is no longer used to vehicular traffic is a 19 <sup>th</sup> century keystone bridge.
<b>Waterbodies</b>	
<b><i>Ashby Reservoir</i></b>	This is a compensating reservoir – a back up for the Fitchburg Reservoir. The 86-acre reservoir is a flooded meadow created by an earthen dam with a spillway.
<b><i>Fallulah Brook</i></b>	Headwater in Ashby (Fitchburg Reservoir) and flows to Fitchburg to the North Branch of the Nashua River.
<b><i>Damon Pond and Dam</i></b>	In Willard Brook State Forest. Formed by the 500' drop of Willard Brook. A swimming pond with own waterfall. Flows down to Trapfall Brook. A camp ground, built by the

	CCC, was once located here.
<b><i>Fire Ponds and Hydrants</i></b>	Throughout the town there are many fire ponds formed by earthen dams and having spickets or hydrants next to them for fighting fires. They were built in the 1930s – WPA work.
<b><i>Fitchburg Reservoir</i></b>	Located in the southwest corner of town and owned by city of Fitchburg for which it is the water supply is the 150-acre Fitchburg Reservoir.
<b><i>Lower Wright's Pond</i></b>	A Great Pond.
<b><i>Pearl Hill Brook</i></b>	Headwater in Ashby.
<b><i>Souhegan Brook-South Branch</i></b>	Headwater in Ashby and flows north to New Hampshire to the Nashua River.
<b><i>Trapfall Brook</i></b>	Headwater in Ashby and flows to the Squannacook.
<b><i>Upper Wright's Pond</i></b>	A Great Pond of which 80% of the shoreline land is owned by the Commonwealth (two parcels) and the Fitchburg Rod and Gun Club (one parcel).
<b><i>Watatic Pond</i></b>	Watatic Pond is on the western boundary line between Ashburnham and Ashby (which is also the line between Middlesex County and Worcester County. Route 119 crosses the pond into Ashburnham which begins on the western edge of Watatic Pond.
<b><i>Willard Brook</i></b>	Headwater in Ashby and flows to the Squannacook River. Willard Brook in Ashby was considered for a Boston reservoir at the time that Quabbin was created; however the rise of land on Route 31 would have required a dam in order to stop water from flowing toward Fitchburg.

# ASHBY OPENSOURCE & HISTORIC RESOURCES

- Note: Default Legend, all categories may not appear on the map.
- DCR
  - DCRS/DFG
  - DFG
  - Other State
  - County
  - Municipal
  - Federal
  - Land Trust
  - Non-Profit
  - Conservation Restriction
  - Agricultural Preservation Restriction
  - CR/APR Combination
  - Other Legal Interest
  - State Historic Resources
  - Interstate
  - State
  - Local Road
  - Rivers and Streams
  - Lakes and Ponds

- ### High Priority Heritage Landscapes
1. Ashby Stock Farm
  2. Caves on Jewett Hill
  3. Cemeteries
    - a. Ashby First Parish Burial Ground
    - b. Glenwood Cemetery
    - c. West Cemetery
  4. Gazebo on Common
  5. Loveland Mill Complex
  6. Route 119
  7. Trapfall Stone Arch Bridge