

Appendix A History

Claremont received its charter in 1764 and was originally divided among the proprietors into parcels of land used for common land, farming, and timbering. Sawmills, gristmills, and related industries were developed at the same time. West Claremont with its fertile land was the center of this development. However, farms were also spread out along the banks of Sugar River and the slopes of Green Mountain. The oldest existing houses from this era are on Clay Hill Road and Jarvis Hill (Route 12A) in the west end of town and on Winter Street in the northeast end of town. Some early houses on the 2nd New Hampshire Turnpike (North St.) remain or have been altered or moved. Within this neighborhood in the area between Washington, Broad, and Hanover Streets a great destruction of historic property, both old and contemporary, occurred as a part of an urban renewal project in the 1970's.

The early center of town was in West Claremont where the Congregationalists and Episcopalians came together to build a shared church – Union Church. This union ended when the Congregationalists moved to the southern end of town and built their own meetinghouse off Maple Ave. The Episcopalians remained in the old settlement area completing their church after the Revolutionary War. In 1823 the Barber family, former Episcopalians and a rector of Union Church, became Roman Catholics built the first Roman Catholic Church adjacent to their house which stood opposite Union Church.

In the early 1790's the town acquired from Col. Josiah Stevens, a portion of his land on the Plain (Broad St.) for a more centrally located town hall. Ichabod Hitchcock, master carpenter and builder of both Union Church and the Congregational Church, moved the Congregational Meetinghouse in 1790 to the site of the present-day City Hall, thus securely establishing this area as the center of town. The meeting house, like most early Congregational churches, served as both church and town meetinghouse. When the Congregationalists completed their new church on Pleasant Street in 1835, the old building became the Town Hall. It was replaced with a new brick Town Hall and Opera House in 1897 designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style by Charles Rich, who also designed buildings at Dartmouth College, and whose firm later designed the Empire State Building. The downtown developed with a mix of industrial, mercantile and residential uses. At the time of General Lafayette's visit to Claremont in 1825, the Tremont Hotel (located in what is now Opera House Square) and other businesses fronted a small square, while the livery stables, "out houses or privies", and other related out buildings were in back of these buildings in the hollow (now Crescent St). This area became known as "dog hollow", a term used for many years even after the area was redeveloped with mill buildings and modern sewer system.

The main street, centered on Broad Street with its town park, had a mixture of uses including the first bank, a small shoe factory and churches, but was primarily an area of fine homes built by some of Claremont's leading citizens. Several of these were demolished to create the current parking area opposite Broad Street Park. Others have been removed as the pressures of commercial development increased, most notably the area of the Claremont Savings Bank. Although some of the remaining homes are still used as residences, many have been converted to professional offices. The building of Stevens High School on Broad Street in 1868, a decade after the town's petition to the state legislature, was financed in part by Paran Stevens. Space was allocated for a town library in the school. That collection was a gift of Samuel P. Fiske from his personal library. But, soon the school needed the space and the library was moved to Sullivan Street. With a gift from Andrew Carnegie, the Fiske Free Library moved back on Broad Street to its current location in 1903. The public land on Broad Street, purchased from

Josiah Stevens around the same time as the old town hall has moved, was used for a park (Broad Street Park) and was divided by paths and roads establishing a very refined boulevard, and became the focal point of a civic, cultural, educational and religious center.

Tremont Square (now Opera House Square) was the center of commercial enterprises. By the mid-1800's, besides the Tremont House which dominated the square, impressive commercial blocks such as the Farwell Block, the Brown Block and Brown's Wooden Block began to replace earlier modest structures. After fire destroyed the Tremont House in 1879, the square was expanded and redeveloped with a new grand hotel on the north side (now the Moody Building) and new banks and library around the corner. Brown's Wooden Block, also destroyed by fire around the same time was replaced by the Union Block. What were originally devastating events for the town became the impetus to redevelop the town's commercial center into an impressive European style square.

As the town continued to grow, due to the development of the mills in the late 19th century, the commercial center began to expand to Pleasant Street which had been primarily residential. Fine homes were eventually replaced with large commercial blocks all the way to the Congregational Church containing shops, professional offices, a hotel and Post office. Further commercial development on Pleasant Street continued past the church throughout the 20th century with less impressive buildings. A few of the fine older homes are still present on Pleasant Street, but have been converted to other uses. During the industrial boom in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Claremont was fortunate to have the builder/architect, Hira Beckwith. His building design/style, primarily Queen Anne Style, was used for business blocks, civic, commercial, and factory buildings, and residential houses. It gave Claremont an architectural unity unknown to any other town in New Hampshire or Vermont during the Victorian Period. That architectural unity held until the late 1960s. It had been slowly destroyed by business sprawl and neglect until the late 1970's with the establishment of the Claremont Historic District Commission.

Tremont Square (now Opera House Square), Pleasant Street and Broad Street provided the business/residential mix in Claremont that was identified in the Historic District, the first multiple use historic District on the National Register. Also of great importance within the Historic District was the development of the area from Opera House Square to the Lower Village. This period starting in the

1830's began the transformation of Claremont from a typical New England village to an industrial city due to the expanded use of water power along the Sugar River with sites for up to nine dams. In 1832 the Claremont Manufacturing Company was chartered and purchased 15 acres of land between Sullivan Street and the Sugar River including four of the most valuable water falls in the village. They laid out three new streets, Main Street, River Street and Central Street, and engaged in widespread real estate speculation and development. Around the bridge on Main Street numerous industrial and commercial sites were developed over the next three decades, while both private and industrial housing lined Main Street to the east and west. River Street served the Claremont Manufacturing Company factories and housing. On a ridge on Central Street overlooking the developing Lower Village private residences were built including a series of fine Greek Revival mansions with temple style porticoes, built by noted architect Aaron Howland of Walpole and described at the time as the finest homes in a 50-mile radius. A new Baptist Church was built at the junction of Main Street and Central Streets, between the earlier town center and the emerging factories. Later, a Catholic church and Methodist church were also built on Central Street, the latter of which was later destroyed by fire.

Some wealthy citizens of the older town center, fearing that the town's center would shift to the rapidly developing Lower Village, formed The Upper Falls Company in 1836. This company evolved into the Monadnock Mills Company in 1843 and developed several specialized mill buildings mostly along Water and Crescent Streets for the production of cotton goods as well as housing for their workforce. Thus, began the development of various mill enterprises on both sides of the Sugar River which continued to transform the town's center through the 1930's. Other than the Monadnock Mills, the most notable set of industrial buildings were erected by the Sullivan Machine Company, which later became Joy Manufacturing, a leading employer and dominant force in the community until it closed in the 1980's. Over time Joy built a vast array of buildings on both sides of the Sugar River as well as rail lines to transport their goods to markets. Joy eventually closed its facilities in the center of town and built new ones along 12A in West Claremont leaving a vast array of empty brick buildings in the city center. While some of these were converted to other uses over the years, many remained vacant. Time eventually took its toll on many of these structures due to a lack of maintenance and various fires. On the north side of the river, all but the Sullivan smoke stack were eventually torn down and now serve as a park, visitor center, and parking for the mill area. The establishment of the Historic District in 1978 allowed federal funding and tax incentives for some buildings on the south side of the river to be converted to residential use.

Also of note during this period was the restoration of the Claremont Opera House, addition of the police station/atrium, and improvements to Opera House Square (then Tremont Square) and Pleasant Street. In the early 1970's talk of removing the upper floors of the City Hall/Opera House due to deterioration and safety issues spurred local residents to form a committee to put the building on the National Register of Historic Places and secure funding for its restoration. Federal funding was essential in securing most of the monies needed for these efforts. Beside the restoration of the Opera House, the Square was improved by a new parking area and gardens in the center, repaving the sidewalks with pavers, the burying of power lines and addition of historic lighting poles in the square as well as along Pleasant Street, returning the city center to a more appropriate historic appearance. The Opera House was re-opened in 1979 and again after full restoration in 1983. It remains a vital part of the cultural and economic vitality of the city to this time.

In the first decade of the 21st century the city was finally successful in its attempts to develop a core of mill buildings along Water Street and Main Street. A complex public/private partnership was formed which converted two buildings into the Common Man Hotel & Restaurant, along with Red River Computer Company. Part of the old Sullivan foundry building was incorporated into a new parking garage and office space serving the mill complex. Unfortunately, a fourth building slated for high end housing was not completed due to the downturn of the economy and housing market in the second half of the decade. Despite the economic downturn, this development has set the stage for further positive development in the area once the economy recovers.

As the city moves into the coming decades it will face continued pressures from various forms of development. Many important buildings which help define the unique character of our community lie outside the area protected by the Historic District. Loss of these structures would mean a loss of

community identity. As witnessed by the recent mill re-development, historic structures can provide the defining character that many developers desire and seek. They help define the community and connect us to our past. By taking note of our history and taking advantage of some of the tools available and described further in this chapter, the city can manage both desired growth and maintain our historic and cultural heritage that makes Claremont a unique and desirable place to live and do business.

Taken from the 2011 Master Plan