

## **Sunderland Historical Commission**

History Through Houses\*

\*and other buildings

Photographs by Jon Crispin

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### **Swampfield Early History 1500-1675**

Pocumtucks and Norwottucks are thought to have occupied this region, living in permanent encampments along the Connecticut River and archeological sites have been located here on the outer edges of the floodplain. A trail system ran through this area, and one of the three north-south trails became Main Street.

In 1674, the General Court granted permission to establish a new plantation. The settlers were given seven years to attract residents who would build homes and hire a minister. The settlement was named Swampfield. The settlers also purchased the land, for a token amount, from the Norwottucks.

By 1675, Swampfield had been surveyed, built upon and occupied. Shortly thereafter, it was abandoned, when relations with the Native Americans became hostile.

### **First Period 1675-1775**

In 1713, Hadley and Hatfield residents petitioned to re-establish Swampfield. This time, the General Court gave them three years to establish 40 families occupying their land, and to have a minister in residence.

In 1714, 39 men and their families signed on as Proprietors of the Plantation of Swampfield. They laid out Main Street, with thirty-nine house lots fourteen rods wide, with about three and a half acres. Lots on the west side of the street extended to the river. Lots on the east side extended to the swamp. This plan is what constitutes Sunderland center today. Each of the original families was also granted three divisions of plow land, and five to eight acres of swamp land, which could be drained and used for mowing or wood lots. The cemetery was also laid out in 1714. Field roads were laid out to separate the common lands. Lower Lane became Old Amherst Road. What is now School Street was laid out around 1720 to lead from Main Street to a ferry which operated from 1719.

The residents finally secured a minister in 1717, and having fulfilled the obligations set by the General Court, the town was incorporated as Sunderland, thought to be a more attractive name than Swampfield, in 1718.

By 1721, a teacher had been hired, who boarded with families and held classes in different houses. The first schoolhouse was built in 1731, and it doubled as a place for town meetings.

Major crops were rye, winter and summer wheat, peas, and corn. Residents also had cattle, sheep and pigs. The minister hired in 1747 was paid in produce: wheat, rye, Indian corn, and pork.



*168 North Main Street built c. 1715-1730*

This is the only remaining house built by an original Proprietor, Isaac Graves. Georgian in style, the house has a large central chimney and saltbox style roof line - that is, the roof extends to the first story level in the back. There are gable overhangs on the north and south sides, a sign of an early house.

Erastus Pomeroy, who lived in this house in the early 19th century, drove a stage coach between South Hadley and Northfield in the 1830's.



*1 Old Amherst Road c. 1753*

A Georgian style house. Period features include a large central chimney, gable end overhang, second story windows placed close to the cornice, or eaves, and "articulated molding" along the cornice. Note also the early style windows, with small panes of glass, 12 over 12. The doorway has "battered pilasters," or flat columns that become more slender at the top. The pilasters support a triangular pediment, a typical feature for the period. 69 South Main Street c. 1756



*Hubbard Tavern 1763*

This is a fine Georgian style house. It has the large central chimney, gable end overhang, and windows close to the cornice that are characteristic of the period. It has a pedimented doorway with an ornamented frieze.

The house was used as a tavern for over one hundred years. On April 19, 1775, a group of Minutemen met and stayed here before responding to the Lexington alarm. It was here also that the Free Masons were formed and held many of their first meetings on the second floor in a double room.

The house has been continually occupied by the Hubbard family, who have consistently been important citizens in the community.

The barns are of a much later style, called the Stick Style, built c. 1865.

#### Federal Period 1776-1825

Sunderland's support for the Revolutionary War was prompt and unequivocal. One town resident was driven out of town for being a Tory. Sunderland, unlike other nearby towns of Hatfield, Hadley, and Springfield, did not have the wealthy and powerful Tories, known as River Gods, among its residents. Many residents fought in the war, and Sunderland resident Richard Montague, who lived on the site of the house at 69 South Main Street between 1750 and 1756, served on General George Washington's staff and took part in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

The town, by assessing its residents, sent provisions for its soldiers and provided money for its share of beef for the entire army. Because cash was short and of unreliable value, soldiers were offered beef, corn, wool, and leather to serve in the army for six months.

After the war, the town built on its agricultural economy. Stall-feeding of cattle proved profitable from 1780-1840's. In October, a farmer would buy surplus cattle from upland farmers, pen them up in barns from November through the following summer, when the cattle would be sent back to the uplands. The freed-up valley pasture land was used for more intensive agriculture. When the cattle reached optimum weights, they were driven to Brighton and sold for cash. Cash helped the town's farmers move from the 18th century cooperative bartering to the market based agriculture of the mid-19th century.

An offshoot of the cattle business were tanning and currying businesses, located at 153 North Main Street and 207 North Main Street. Water for the tanning vats was

brought by way of wooden pipes from one of the foothills of Mt. Toby by the Rowe Spring Society, a company formed in 1796 to provide spring water to the town. Broom corn was introduced in 1825, and became a major cash crop. Broom corn was grown in the summer, and families made brooms from the crop in the winter. In 1812, a group of investors saw potential for profit from a toll bridge, to compete with the four ferries crossing the river. They formed a corporation and constructed the town's first bridge with timber from Mt. Toby. They also built the Toll House, at 38 School Street. That bridge, the first of ten on the site, was carried off by ice in 1817.

In 1791, there were three school districts in town, with a school for each. Between 1762 and 1816 a center school was built where the library is now located.



*46 South Main Street c. 1800*

This is a Federal style house that retains the center chimney design used during the Georgian period. Note the doorway, with its narrow pilasters and fan light, and the "Palladian style" window above it, a distinctive detail often used elsewhere in the period. Note the detail on the gable end. Rather than displaying a Georgian-style overhang, the gable is accented.

This house was built on a lot that was divided off of one of the original lots.



*3 Plumtree Road c. 1815*

This is Sunderland's only brick Federal style house, and it is a fine example of the period. It has a tripped roof, two interior chimneys, and a central entry. Note that the second story windows are evenly spaced, and compare to the earlier Georgian

style houses. Window lintels and sills are granite. The entry has a semicircular fanlight over delicate pilasters and recessed sidelights.

The Plumtrees area was added to the town in 1729, and was settled in 1730. This house was built by a great grandson of Simon Cooley, who was one of the original forty Proprietors. Simon's son Abner moved to the Plumtrees area and built a log cabin in 1757.



*104 North Main Street "Town House" c. 1820-1828*

Built by the church for church and town use, the building was sold to investors in 1834 when matters of church and state were separated. In spite the investor's hope that it would be used as a town hall, the building's former association with the church prevented voters from accepting it as a town hall. The building sat vacant until 1849, when it was converted to a dwelling. It was later used as a store. The building is Greek Revival in style, with obvious references to Greek temples. Note its stocky, more blocky profile compared to the more delicate lines of the Federal style in the Old Bank.



*108 North Main Street "Sunderland Bank" c. 1825*

The Bank was formed in 1825, when area farmers had enough economic success to need a place to put their money. Bank founders were local residents Erastus Graves (who ran a general store), Nathaniel Smith (who owned a store dealing in lumber farm goods and produce}, and Roswell Field, who put together \$100,000. In 1831 the bank moved to Amherst and the Sunderland Bank building was turned into a general store, run by James H. Taylor in 1832.

The building is late Federal, early Greek Revival in style. Note that unlike the earlier houses, the gable end faces the street, and four flat column-like wood "pilasters" run

up the facade. In the gable is an architectural detail that was popular in western Massachusetts, which has been seen in Brimfield and Northfield. The doorway is flanked by side lights, to let more light into the entry hall.

#### Greek Revival Period 1825-1850

This was a period of modest growth and relative prosperity for Sunderland. There were 666 people in 1830, and 832 in 1870. Many sons and daughters moved west, to Illinois, Minnesota, New York and Ohio, and some lost their lives to typhus. This population loss was offset by the arrival of immigrants, mostly from Ireland in this period.

Sunderland's commercial district consisted of several stores, the bank (briefly), a tailor, and active river trade, with logs, lumber and shingles piled high on what is now School Street.

In 1831, ahead of the Commonwealth as a whole, perhaps through pressure from the Baptists, the town voted to separate church and state. The Congregational Church created its own parish. Property was separated into town and church ownership, and the Town House, which had been used for both church and town meetings, was purchased by investors hoping it would be used as a town hall. It wasn't. A new Congregational church was built in 1836, followed by the chapel in 1849.

Between the 1840's and 1850's broom corn became Sunderland's first large scale, commercial market crop. In 1845, town farmers grew 131,460 pounds of broom corn, and produced 9,100 bushels of broom corn seed. In that year, Sunderland produced 82,000 brooms, second only to Whately, which produced 160,087.

Tobacco took over in the 1850's. Market garden crops were grown throughout this period.

Sunderland farmers raised a variety of livestock - cattle, pigs, sheep and of course, horses. For some reason, geese became popular livestock in this period. Flocks grew to enormous size, slowed traffic, and littered the landscape until annoyed townspeople took the situation in hand. Geese apparently were "sent down the river."

Main Street's sugar maples were planted in the 1830's, a project led by South Main Street resident Hollis Graves.



*55 Falls Road c. 1832*

This is a well-preserved example of a Greek Revival house. The house has two "main doorways" one facing the road, and one on the side. The roadside entrance presents the traditional Greek Revival feature - eaves that make a full return to form a pediment in the manner of a Greek temple. Note the wide pilasters and the wide band just under the eaves that encircles the house, called an "entablature" or "frieze."

Unlike earlier houses, glass panes could be purchased in larger sizes, so windows are 6/6 instead of the earlier 12/ 12.

Monroe Smith was born and lived in the house in the early 1900's. He was the founder of the youth hosteling movement. The house was donated to the Youth Hostel organization in 1937, and it was used as a hostel until 1978.



*86 South Main Street c. 1835*

This is a smaller example, one of many in town, of the Greek Revival style. It is one and a half stories, with the gable end facing the street. Its main doorway is on the south facade, not facing the street. Note its broad entablature under the eaves, and the wide pilasters at the corners.



*90 South Main Street c. 1835*

Another two story Greek Revival style house with the gable end facing the street. This house is most notable for its fine doorway. It is highly likely that the model for this doorway was taken from a Greek Revival carpenter's handbook.



*First Congregational Church 91 South Main Street 1836*

This is the third building of the Congregational Church Society in Sunderland. The town's first meeting house was built in 1717 and was in the middle of what is now the Main Street. The second meeting house was dedicated in 1794. In 1835, the Parish looked into repairing it, but a new one was instead erected on the site. This building was extensively changed in the 1870's.





*120 North Main Street c. 1843*

This is an example of the Gothic Revival style. It was considered to be a more picturesque and romantic style than the Greek Revival it replaced. The decorative ornaments are intended to suggest Gothic buildings in medieval England and Europe. The front gable has a king truss ornament, and bargeboards or "gingerbread" lining the raking eaves. Note the basic house form that features a transverse gable, typical in Gothic Revival houses, which introduces a more complex volume to the interior of the house.

#### Early Industrial Period 1850-1880

Riverside Cemetery was expanded twice with purchases of additional land, and the first hearse was purchased in 1870 for town use.

The temperance movement was vigorously pursued on a door to door basis. Eighty-five Sunderland men served in the Civil War. Many town residents served together in the 52nd Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteers.

Beginning in the 1880's, immigrants from central and eastern Europe began to arrive in the Connecticut River Valley, often having been recruited at the New York docks for farm labor.

Franklin H. Williams diary, which covers the years between 1852 and 1891, helps provide a detailed account of life on a hard-working, progressive Sunderland farm. The Williams grew a variety of farm crops, including broom corn, carrots and onions, turnips, apples, wheat and rye, millet, grass, and potatoes. After a trip to South Carolina, he tried out a crop of sweet potatoes, and entered the products in the Greenfield fair in 1855. He replaced carrots with tobacco in 1859, growing both fillers and wrappers. From six acres he produced 2,833 fillers and 6,678 binders. Williams' s work was diverse. Diary entries show that in addition to traditional farm work, he cut wood on Mt. Toby, collected sap, sold butter, gathered flood wood, drew loads of stone to Whitmore's mills to grind for plaster, collected compost and manure, ran a mail order business selling Egyptian millet, and cut ice on Munsell's Pond on Falls Road.



*4 South Main Street c. 1851*

This is another Gothic Revival style house. Note that the roof line has become steeper than on earlier houses, and that the windows are elongated in shape. This house has decorative bargeboards, and a fully developed transverse gable. The house was built by Benjamin Darling, who was a popular carpenter in town.



*37 South Main Street c. 1850- 1860*

This house is Italianate in style. The style was meant to look like an Italian villa. Note its nearly square form, and very low-pitched roof with wide overhanging eaves. The paired scroll-cut brackets under the eaves, and the slender, paired posts on the porch are characteristic of the style.

This rather grand house reflects some of the local prosperity that resulted from growing tobacco. Tobacco barns still dot the landscape, and are now in high demand again as tobacco growing has made something of a comeback.



*Old Town Hall 1867*

The Old Town Hall was built to accommodate a number of town functions, including classrooms, offices and a library. It replaced a town hall, located just north of the present library, that burned. Many of the building's original Italianate features are still visible, such as the prominent modillion blocks at the cornice and raking eaves and its triple window composition in the gable end. It was renovated in the 1940's and now has a Neo-Colonial entrance and cupola.

### Late Industrial Period 1880-1915

Immigrants from Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Czechoslovakia and Austria had a profound effect on the size of Sunderland in this period. Immigrants first came to town primarily as farm hands, and the census of 1900 shows that farms had on average one or two hired men who lived with the farm family. As farm hands married or were joined by their families, new housing was built, primarily on the outskirts of town. Many of the immigrant families, like the Irish before them, stayed in town and became farm owners and leading citizens. In 1902 a gas house was built on the lot of the house at 33 School Street to provide domestic lighting. It burned down in 1910 and was not replaced. Also in 1902 an electric street railway was built through town. The streetcar allowed passengers unprecedented access to neighboring towns and connections throughout the state. Freight could be transported on the flatbed trolley cars to the Massachusetts Central Railroad in Amherst, which helped farmers send their goods to more markets. Electricity was first made available in 1904 when several entrepreneurs began the Sunderland Electric Light and Power Company, and set up generating equipment on Chard Pond on Falls Road. The company ran into equipment and water supply problems, and it shut down after a few years. The face of agriculture changed again. Tobacco growing waned, and was supplanted by vegetable production as a cash crop. Potatoes, cucumbers and onions were important new crops, and dairy farming continued to be popular. Franklin Williams's diary notes that he and his contemporaries began growing strawberries in 1887. In 1891, Picturesque Franklin County noted that Sunderland was famous for its onion crop, reporting that 75,000 bushels had been grown.



*Graves Memorial Library 1900*

A library for public use was in existence in town as early as 1794. In 1838, Horatio Graves set aside a room for the library in his general store, located on the site of the present library. When the store burned in 1854, so went the library. The library was next housed in the Old Town Hall, built in 1867. In 1898, John L. Graves, a former Sunderland resident, agreed to pay for a new library.

The library is an architectural gem, with asymmetrical massing in the Tudor Revival style. It is built of yellow bricks, with limestone window surrounds and porch details, and a glazed tile roof. It has leaded glass windows. It was designed by the Allen Brothers in Amherst.



*76 South Main Street c. 1910*

This house is, like the library, Tudor Revival in style. It has stucco walls with wood inlaid to mimic half-timbered houses. The house was designed by Karl Putnam, a prominent Smith College-based architect, who also designed the Old School/Town Offices building.



*83 South Main Street Built 1914*

This is a large, high style Colonial Revival house. It has a Palladian window in the gable end of the north facade, echoing one built over 100 years before at 46 South Main Street. The house has a large front porch with Doric columns and a pedimented roof signaling the entry.

The house was built for Frederick Kidder, who was a prosperous onion farmer.

#### Early Modern Period 1915-1950

The flood of 1936 and the hurricane of 1938 caused damage in town. Sunderland lost its 1877 bridge in the flood of 1936. Tons of silt were left on fields which had to be removed and trucked away. The hurricane knocked down many trees, forty tobacco barns, and caused floods again to cover the farm land and to rise five feet above the cemetery.

Farms became more mechanized, allowing fewer farmers to produce more. The automobile became more affordable and available to people with modest incomes. The result was a shift from an agricultural community to a residential community where most residents commuted to work in other towns. Automobile tourism made its impact as a few more commercial buildings appeared along Main Street.

In 1917, Harold Warner constructed the town's first automobile service garage. Ben Toczydowski, who came to South Deerfield from Poland in 1903, had started as a farm hand, did shoe repairs, and then moved on to run his own farm. He also saved up to begin a service station and an ice cream store on School Street. After the new bridge was built in 1938 and Bridge Street (now Rt. 116) was put in, he moved his service station and ice cream store, which he converted to a liquor store, to that street to be near traffic. Both are still in operation.

The Warner family operated a farm equipment and supply business at the L&M Warner Grain Store. The Skibiski family began selling farm equipment in the 1930's, and grew to have one of the largest farm equipment businesses in the state in the 1930's and 1940's.

Theoren Warner built the town's first commercial tobacco sorting shop at 110 North Main Street, which was sold to a tobacco company in 1927. In 1926 Theoren and Raymond Warner diversified and began a construction business. In the 1940's one hundred eleven men worked in the building behind the old Town Hall where they specialized in highway and bridge construction.

Market gardening flourished in this period. Tobacco, onions and potatoes were the most profitable crops. Onion production was at its peak in 1928 with 850 acres

harvested. Onion growing began to decline in the late 1930's, due to disease and competition from the west. Tobacco growing varied wildly from year to year, but gradually declined until the Cuban embargo put an end to it. Dairy farming was strong through the period, with sixty-four dairy farms operating in 1937. By 1950, farmers began to sell out and within five years over half the town's farms had been sold.



*Fourth Parsonage 115 North Main Street 1917*

This is the fourth parsonage for the Congregational Church. The second and third parsonages still stand on South Main Street. This house is a good example of the Colonial Revival style. Note the larger scale windows, which allow more light into the interior. The plan is three bays wide, rather than the typical five bays which we saw in the Colonial/Georgian period. It is now privately owned.



*18 Amherst Road 1917*

This building is one of the town's few early 20th century commercial buildings. Although the windows have been altered, it retains much of its early appearance thanks to the preservation of the parapet wall. Built by Harold M. Warner as the town's first automotive service garage. It was next owned by Frank O. Williams, then Theoren Warner. Lester Miller bought and operated the garage in the 1940's. In 1947, Roman Skibiski bought the garage for his farm equipment business.



*12 South Main Street 1919*

This is a Craftsman style bungalow, and how different this style is in the context of what we have seen to date! Bungalows are primarily one-story buildings, with the roof line sweeping down to cover a large porch. The porch is often raised above the street level, requiring that the house be reached by means of a small staircase. Windows are clustered. This house is a particularly fine example of the style, and note that there is a garage built in the same style in the back.



*127 North Main Street c. 1920*

This is another Craftsman bungalow, also built to look as if it were a one story building. The tripped roof is a prominent feature, and it sweeps down to cover the front porch.





*Millstone Farm Market 24 South Main Street 1929*

For lack of a better term, we call this style "roadside novelty." Unique and eye-catching commercial buildings such as this one were built all over the country in this period, when automobile travel added a new market for farmers and other entrepreneurs to reach directly (think of the "Milk Bottle" in Whately). The Graves family built this to sell produce from their farm. Richard Graves, Sr. used old millstones in constructing the front wall.