

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Massachusetts Historical Commission



TOPSFIELD TOWN COMMON HISTORIC DISTRICT

TOPSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

JUNE 7, 1976

was accepted on

for inclusion in the

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The National Register is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation, and includes districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology and culture. The National Register was established under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is administered in Massachusetts by the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Elizabeth Reed Amador
State Historic Preservation Officer
Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Paul Guzzi
Secretary of the Commonwealth
Chairman, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Post-It® Fax Note	7671	Date	10/14/03	P. of Pages	11
To	Jane Moir	From	K. DAVES		
Co./Dept.		Co.	MHC		
Phone #		Phone #	617-727-8470		
Fax #	202-297-5295	Fax #			



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

The Director of the National Park Service

Gary Everhardt

is pleased to inform you that the historic property listed on the enclosed sheet has been nominated by the State Historic Preservation Officer responsible for your State's implementation of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, P.L. 89-665 (80 Stat. 915), as amended. It has accordingly been entered in the National Register of Historic Places. A leaflet explaining the National Register is enclosed for your information and convenience.

Enclosures



RECEIVED

JUN 16 1976

MASS. HIST. COMM.

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTERSTATE MASSACHUSETTSDate Entered JUN 7 1976NameLocation

Topsfield Town Common District

Topsfield
Essex County**COPY OF CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION**Also NotifiedHon. Edward M. Kennedy
Hon. Edward W. Brooke
Hon. Michael J. Harrington**RECEIVED**

JUN 16 1976

MASS. HIST. COMM.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Topsfield Town Common District

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATIONSTREET & NUMBER North Common, East Common, South Common, West Common, High St. Ext.,
Washington, Main, High, Howlett Streets

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Topsfield

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Sixth

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

025

COUNTY

Essex

CODE

009

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☒ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☒ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☒ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☒ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☒ MUSEUM☒ PARK☒ PRIVATE RESIDEN☒ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Multiple

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Topsfield

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts 01983

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Essex County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

32 Federal Street

CITY, TOWN

Salem

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYSTITLE Inventory of the Historic Assets of the Commonwealth
HABS (MASS-214, Parson Capen House)

DATE 1973

1935, -36

☒ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Massachusetts Historical Commission; Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Boston; Washington, DC

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE #9 in 1900
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Topsfield Town Common District is located in the center of the town of Topsfield. To the south of the district is the commercial area of town and on the other edges of the Common are scattered residential areas. The district encompasses the only remaining common land of the township and includes ten religious, civic and residential buildings. The area has well-cared for trees, shrubs and monuments, and has no intrusions or drastic alterations which detract from its appearance. The Topsfield Town Common is the core of the local historic district known as the Topsfield Common Historic District, established in 1974.

Among the buildings facing south onto the Common is the residence at the corner of Washington and Main Streets (#1). It is two stories and has a ridge roof pierced by two brick chimneys. The house is five bays wide and has a center entrance flanked by sidelights and surmounted by a large entablature. Windows have six-over-six lights, and the clapboard house is painted pale yellow. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were side covered porches on the south and east sides of the building.

The Emerson-Jordan House (#2) was built in 1808 and is three stories with a hip roof. It is white clapboard except for the westerly end which is red brick. There is a two-story ell attached to the east side of the house and a barn to the rear. The house is five bays wide and the center entrance has a fanlight and sidelights. Windows have black louvered shutters and two-over-two lights. A porch supported by four square posts extends the length of the facade, and four brick chimneys rise from each corner of the roof. The interior contains paneling by the noted Salem builder Samuel McIntire.

The Parish House (#3) was built in 1853 by Jacob Foster and John H. Potter. Potter, who had considerable local distinction as a skilled builder, also constructed the Town Hall. The Parish House is a two-story, white clapboard, ridge roof building with its gable end facing the street. The focal point of the facade is a slightly projecting three-bay section divided by three pilasters and surmounted by a pediment. The entrance is centered on the first floor of this section and flanked by a window on either side. On the second floor in each of the outer bays there are windows situated beneath arched moldings. The building is four bays deep and has a deep cornice. The original steeple was removed in the early twentieth century.

The oldest building in the district is the Parson Capen House (#4) (NHL) which was built in 1683 and reveals influences of sixteenth and seventeenth century English architecture. The two-story house has a steeply pitched roof with a pilastered brick center chimney. The building is covered with dark stained red oak clapboards and the roof is finished with wooden handdriven shingles, one to three feet long. There are overhangs with pendants on the front and gable ends. The parson Capen House was carefully restored in 1911 under the direction of George Francis Dow.

On the east side of the Common, facing west, is the Emerson Center (#5), a Federal mansion built in 1814. The two-story, white clapboard building is five bays wide and has a center entrance. The door has an elliptical fanlight and sidelights and is situated under a portico supported by slender columns. Windows have black shutters and six-over-six lights. At each corner of the hip roof is a tall brick chimney, and there is a balustrade around the edge of the roof. On the north side of the house is a red brick ell.

continued

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARI
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Topsfield Town Common District is significant as the earliest area of settlement in town and as the center of town activity for three centuries. The district is also a showcase of architectural styles, from the Parson Capen House of 1683 to the Town Library of 1935.

Before recorded history the area now known as the Topsfield Common was roamed by Chief Massomment and his braves from the Agauman Tribe. In 1630 English settlers pushed up the Ipswich River and established themselves in the area, which they named "New Meadows. In 1650 the Great and General Court gave the residents of New Meadows "ye power to be a towne" and approved the name Topsfield, after Toppesfield, England, the ancestral home of many prominent town residents.

Between 1630 and 1650 a training field was set up on what is now the Common and surrounding land. This field was used for training militia in early colonial times, and local Minutemen gathered here before departing for Concord and Lexington and later Bunker Hill. They also trained on the Common and at the Town Hall (#7) during both World Wars I and II. The American Legion headquarters were in the Town Hall for many years, and a monument stands across from the library as a memorial to those who fought in the Civil War.

The first meeting house in Topsfield was built in 1703 on the site of the present Congregational Church (#8), and a second meeting house was erected there in 1759-60. In 1841 the building was moved to Salem where it was rebuilt on Boston Street and used as a tannery. Town meetings and political rallies were later held in the downstairs hall (Union Hall) of the Parish House (#3) from 1853 to 1873 and in the Town Hall (#7) from 1873 until when space proved inadequate. Union Hall and the Town Hall were also used for dramatic presentations, concerts and lectures. After 1952 the Town Hall meeting room fell into state of disrepair, but it was extensively renovated in 1975 as a Bicentennial Auditorium and once again serves as a center for educational and cultural events. Town offices and police headquarters are still located in the Town Hall, and the room to the left of the main entrance has been in continuous use as the town treasurer's office since 1873.

The house at the corner of Main and Washington Streets (#1) was built in 1832 and operated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Augustus W. Smith as a summer residence. The house was known for some time as Smith's Tavern and is used as a residence today.

The Emerson-Jordan House (#2) and the Emerson Center (#5) were both associated with the field's well-known Emerson family. Reverend John Emerson first built his house in 1731 and part of it was retained in the structure of the larger house built in 1808 by William Emerson. The Emerson Center was built in 1814 by Joseph Emerson and later belonged to daughter Harriet Jane Emerson and her husband Charles H. Holmes. Holmes was the son of John Holmes, the first U.S. Senator from Maine. The house was sold to the Congregational

continued

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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#7:

The Town Library (#6) was built in 1935, using basic plans prepared in 1912 by Harold Field Kellogg. The brick classical revival building is two stories and has a two-story projecting portico supported by four columns. A large ell to the rear was added in 1974.

The Town Hall (#7) was built in 1873 by Topsfield's leading carpenter John H. Potter, using plans drawn up by Boston architects Lord and Fuller. The building exhibits characteristics of the Chateausque and Stick styles. It is covered with white clapboards and measures 80 by 46 feet. The facade is five bays wide and the side elevations are six bays deep. The rear portion of the Town Hall is two stories and the front quarter contains a third floor within the steep hip roof section. The central door stands under a 12-foot wide porch supported by paired columns and a clock tower rises above it.

Next to the Town Hall is the Congregational Church (#8), built in 1842 under contract to Mark R. Jewett of Rowley, Massachusetts. The Greek Revival church has two Ionic columns in antis and on its square tower is a tall spire and four pinnacles.

At the southeast corner of the district are two facing residences which serve as an approach to the district. The residence at 11 High Street (#9) is a white clapboard structure which was originally part of a larger house built in 1756. This portion of the house was moved from Main Street around 1900. The residence at 14 High Street (#10) is a white shingled early twentieth century structure with an attached garage at the east end.

#8:

Church on June 1, 1886, and served as a parsonage and now as offices and classrooms by the church.

The Parish House (#3) of the Congregational Church was originally built as the Methodist Church which dissolved in the early twentieth century. Today it serves as a parish house and a meeting place for local organizations.

Originally a small farming community, the town of Topsfield has experienced considerable growth in the twentieth century. In 1940 the total population was less than 1000. By 1961 there were 3550 residents, and today more than 5200 people live in Topsfield. Nevertheless, the town has retained much of its rural character, particularly in the Common area. Architecturally the district is distinguished by the variety of structures contained in it which still have most of their original detail. The most recently constructed building in the district is the Town Library (#6) (1935) which, although red brick and therefore somewhat incongruous with its neighbors, nonetheless draws its dignity and classical lines from the other buildings around the Common. The oldest structure in the district (1683) is the Parson Capen House (#4) (a National Historic Landmark) which is considered by many authorities to be one of the finest surviving examples of Elizabethan architecture in America. The Emerson-Jordan House (#2) and the Emerson Center (#5) are the two most handsome Federal structures in the Common area, and the former contains

continued

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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#8:
paneling by the noted builder Samuel McIntire. Additional stylistic variety is provided by the Town Hall (#7) and the Greek Revival Congregational Church (#8). The bell in the church tower is inscribed "Revere and Company, Boston, 1817" and was originally in the meeting house which stood on the site before 1842. Together the buildings surrounding the Common represent through their fine architectural quality the growth and development of the town of Topsfield.

Dow, George Francis. History of Topsfield. 1940.
 Dupouy, Deborah. The Parson Capen House. 1970.
Topsfield Historical Society Collections. Vols. 1-31. (1895-1951)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATAACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 13.1 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	3,4,0,2,0,0	4,7,2,2,9,2,0	B	1,9	3,4,0,2,0,0	4,7,2,2,4,4,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,9	3,3,9,7,4,0	4,7,2,2,7,6,0	D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The district encompasses the property lines for buildings 1-6, plus 9 and 10, connecting back property lines by crossing Main Street, Howlett Street and High Street. From the southwesterly corner of lot 6 the district boundary runs along the submerged School Brook to High Street Extension, thence along the center of that street to Washington Street, and thence easterly along that street to where the boundary of lot begins.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Judy D. Dobbs, National Register Editor, and Curtis Campbell, Topsfield Historical Comm

ORGANIZATION

Massachusetts Historical Commission

STREET & NUMBER

294 Washington Street

CITY OR TOWN

Boston

DATE

April 1, 1976

TELEPHONE

617-727-8470

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL ☒

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elizabeth Reed Amason

TITLE

Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE 3/30/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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TOPSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
ESSEX COUNTY

Topsfield Town Common District

#10:

The district begins in the northwest corner at the back property line of #1 and runs easterly along the back (northern) property lines of #2, 3 and 4; thence south along the east property line and then in a straight line 450 feet along property #5 to a point where the boundary turns in a southeast direction and runs 200 feet, thence along the east property line of #10 to the submerged School Brook. The boundary follows the brook to High Street Extension, and crosses to the north side of High Street Extension where it runs west and then east around the corner of property #8, thence across Washington Street and along the west boundary of #1 to the point of beginning.