

FORM H – PARKS AND LANDSCAPES

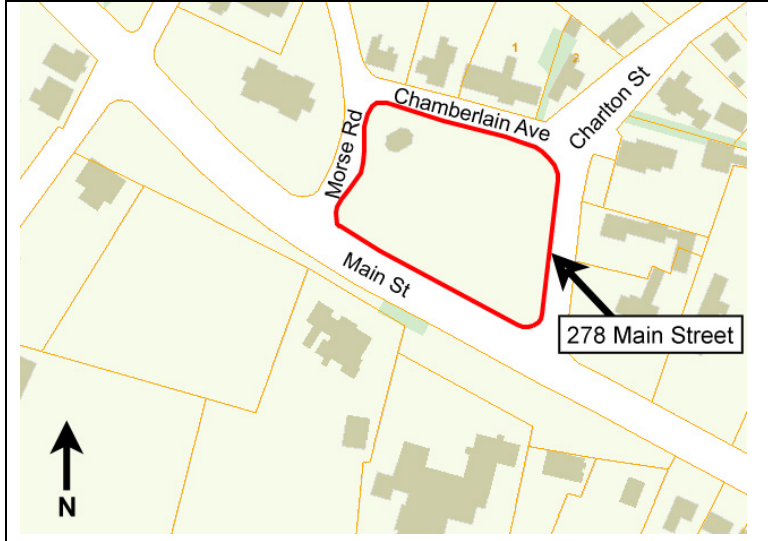
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph



Photo 1. Sturbridge Town Common, looking east.

Locus Map



Assessor's Number Area(s) Form No. Forms within

415-02924-278

STU.A

STU.921,
STU.922

NRDIS 10/9/1977

Town/City: Sturbridge

Place (*neighborhood or village*):

Address or Location: 278 Main Street

Name: Sturbridge Town Common

Ownership: ☒ *Public* ☐ *Private*

Type of Landscape (*check one*):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> park | <input type="checkbox"/> farm land |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> green/common | <input type="checkbox"/> mine/quarry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> garden | <input type="checkbox"/> training field |
| <input type="checkbox"/> boulevard/parkway | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (<i>specify</i>): | |

Date or Period: ca. 1738

Source: Mallory and Orfant 1977; Burns 1988:102

Landscape Architect: None

Location of Plans: N/A

Alterations/Intrusions (*with dates*): weapons magazine (no longer extant) constructed, ca. 1774; construction of Worcester-Stafford Turnpike (now Main Street), 1810; watering trough removed, ca. 1918; bandstand constructed, 1995

Condition: Good

Acreage: 1.79 acres

Setting: The Sturbridge Town Common is at the intersections of Morse Road, Chamberlain Avenue, Charlton Street, and Main Street in southeastern Sturbridge, within a relatively intact late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century neighborhood.

Recorded by: G. Pineo, L. Kline, E. Giacomarra; PAL

Organization: Sturbridge Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): May 2018

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STURBRIDGE

278 MAIN STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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☐ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

The Sturbridge Town Common is within the Sturbridge Common Historic District (STU.A, NRDIS 10/9/1977) but was not adequately documented in the nomination. This form is being prepared to document the history of the Sturbridge Town Common.

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

The Sturbridge Town Common (278 Main Street, 1733, STU.921) is on the east side of Main Street and is bounded by Morse Road on the west, Chamberlain Avenue on the north, Charlton Street on the east, and Main Street on the south. The Joshua Hyde Library (306 Main Street, STU.11) and the Federated Church of Sturbridge and Fiskdale (8 Maple Street, STU.10) are west of the common. The Publick House (277 Main Street, STU.36) is to the south, on the opposite side of Main Street. Early to mid-nineteenth-century houses on the streets north and east face the common.

The Town Common, encompassing approximately one acre, is a flat, level, open, grassy space bisected by a linear, concrete pathway running approximately northeast-southwest from Chamberlain Avenue to Main Street. Main Street is elevated slightly above the edge of the common at the south end, but the other three surrounding streets are at grade with the common. A small number of large historic trees consisting mainly of White Ash dot the common, and the town planted small replacement trees along the north and south edges. A Bandstand (1995, STU.922), is at the northwest corner of the common and is accessed by a short path from Morse Road. Benches and trash receptacles are on either side of the path at the south edge of the common and at the northeast corner. Small, cast iron urns on square pedestals at the southeast and southwest corners are planted with annuals. In the winter, a skating rink, enclosed by plastic boards approximately one foot high, is created at the west end of the common.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The first permanent European settlement in Sturbridge was ca. 1725 by residents of Medfield, following initial exploration by Europeans in the late seventeenth century and graphite mining in the southwestern highlands (MHC 1984:1–2). By 1730, 50 house lots of a minimum of 50 acres each were laid out and 6 acres near the settlement's geographic center purchased from the 2,000-acre farm of Sir Richard Saltonstall for the meetinghouse lot (MHC 1984:3–4). The original town common encompassed the land to the west where the Joshua Hyde Library (STU.11), Federated Church of Sturbridge and Fiskdale (STU.10), and Sturbridge Town Hall (STU.4) are located, as well as the Old Sturbridge Burial Ground (STU.801) and the Sturbridge Center School (STU.39) on the south side of Main Street.

Sturbridge was incorporated as a town in 1738. The first meetinghouse (not extant) was built in 1733, and the Publick House (STU.36) was built in 1772 (MHC 1984:4). The common was initially approximately 6 acres set aside from the rest of the house lots, etc., for the construction of a meetinghouse. At the time land was set aside by the Saltonstalls, two roads were laid out running north and south from the meetinghouse (Levine 1971:3). By 1740, the uses of the lot were listed as "a meetinghouse place a burying place and a training field" (Hynes 1919:9, quoted in Levine 1971:3). In 1774, the men of Sturbridge used the common as a military camp where they organized into companies prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution (1775–1783). A stone weapons magazine was constructed on the common and stocked with five half-barrels of powder, 500 flints, and 5 cwt (hundredweight) of lead (Clark 1838:17). The Worcester-Stafford Turnpike, today's Main Street, was built through the town center in 1810, intersecting with earlier roads including Charlton Street (MHC 1984:4). The construction of the turnpike spurred the development of a small residential cluster around the meetinghouse, much of which remains intact within the Sturbridge Common Historic District (STU.A, NRDIS 10/9/1977). The routing of the turnpike through the center of Sturbridge, near the meetinghouse (no longer extant), was an important stimulus for the nineteenth-century growth of the town as it was part of a major overland stage route from Boston to New York.

In 1824, an arch (no longer extant) was built over Charlton Street at the northeast corner of the common to celebrate the arrival of the Marquis de Lafayette, who visited Sturbridge during his tour of the United States (Davis 1858:170). The common was the site of numerous other celebrations throughout the nineteenth century, including the Sturbridge centennial in 1838 and

Continuation sheet 1

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agricultural fairs. Temporary shoe shops and stock pens were also erected on the common during the nineteenth century (Davis 1858:114; Burns 1984:16–17; Briere 2016). By about 1835, the common had reached its approximate shape, with lots encircling it occupied by numerous houses and shops (Wood 1997:120–121; Levine 1971). Throughout New England, town centers developed as in Sturbridge with churches, schools, shops and stores, and residences in fashionable styles such as the Greek Revival, a mainstay of Sturbridge into the late nineteenth century, and its successor, the Italianate style (Wood and Steinitz 1992:109). In 1851, Elisha Southwick and Amos Holbrook leased a piece of the common (now occupied by the Joshua Hyde Public Library) for 50 years and erected a large shoe shop, possibly an attempt to keep industry in the vicinity of the common (Levine 1971:12). By the middle of the nineteenth century, Fiskdale and, to a lesser extent Snellville, to the west had become the center of town commerce and development around the common slowed (Levine 1971:12). By 1870, the current rectangular layout of the common existed with diagonal paths through the northwest and northeast corners (Beers 1870). The layout may have been a reflection, conscious or otherwise, of the nineteenth-century ideation of the Puritan village, with substantial houses encircling open commons (Wood and Steinitz 1992:105). The rise of interest in “colonial” architecture and lifeways led to the Colonial Revival, in conjunction with the American Centennial and the Philadelphia Exposition (Wood and Steinitz 1992:115). In Sturbridge Center, there are a small number of Colonial Revival-style buildings, as well as large, classically styled church and town buildings. Following the Colonial Revival period, the town common remained largely unchanged until World War I.

A watering trough at the south end of the common was removed during a World War I scrap metal drive (Burns 1988:116). By 1938, the path through the center of the common was extant and the earlier diagonal paths formed a curved U-shape around the site (NETR 1938). In 1971, a remnant of the curved path existed in the northwest corner of the common, creating a triangular island (NETR 1966, 1971). The bandstand was built near the center of the curved path in 1995, and a bronze plaque was installed in the early twenty-first century south of the bandstand at the west edge of the common. In 2012, the town common became the site for a skating rink in the winter, a use that continues to the present (Town of Sturbridge 2012).

The Sturbridge Common was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on November 9, 1977, as part of the Sturbridge Common Historic District.

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PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 2. Sturbridge Town Common, looking northeast from Morse Road toward Chamberlain Avenue.

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Photo 3. Sturbridge Town Common and Bandstand (right), looking west.

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Aerial image of Sturbridge Town Common showing bandstand at northwest corner and linear path running northeast-southwest from Chamberlain Avenue to Main Street (google.com).