

## **Chapter 3 – Historic and Cultural Resources**

### **Introduction**

Webster is the product of a long and varied history, starting with the arrival of the first settlers in 1733. That rich history has fostered a culture... a way of life... that constitutes much of what makes Webster such a special place.

We are reminded of our history and its influence by the presence of older buildings and other historically significant resources. There are many reasons for preserving those resources and their surroundings. Among the most compelling are the psychological ones... those that are associated with the continuity and quality of life. Older buildings provide us with tangible links to the past. They give us a sense of the continuity of time and place. Just as important, they become a part of our own lives.

Gradual and pervasive erosion of historical character can result from the accumulation of incremental changes to buildings and places. It is our challenge to minimize the extent to which this happens in Webster.

If we fail to know, understand, and respect from whence we have come, we are at significant risk of losing our way in our attempts to plan for the future.

This chapter seeks to highlight local historic and cultural resources, to indicate why they are important, to suggest how they should be preserved, and to identify tools and resources appropriate for that task.

The intent of this chapter is to provide to the Town and its residents information and recommendations relevant to:

The teaching of present and future residents about the history that has shaped our town, and the cultivation of an appreciation for that history.

The preservation and protection of historic buildings and other important physical evidence of the Town's history.

The preservation and supplementation of existing historical documentation.

The recognition, promotion, and support of the service organizations and the spirit of volunteerism that shape Webster culture.

### **Community Survey Results**

The Community Survey conducted in June of 2003 conveyed a clear message that Webster residents and property owners value the historic aspects of the community, appreciate the style of life that Webster currently provides, and wish that style of life to be maintained to the extent possible as the Town grows. Specific relevant survey responses include the following:

83% of respondents rated the protection of historic sites and buildings as either “very important” or “important”, even if it involves additional public spending.

88% of respondents ranked the historic character of the Town as either “very important” or “important”.

96% of respondents ranked Community Spirit as either “very important” or “important”.

93% of respondents ranked the Town's education system as either "very important" or "important".

98% of respondents ranked the Town's rural atmosphere as either "very important" or "important".

83% of respondents urged that the Federal Government be encouraged to maintain the Blackwater Reservoir area, where a lot of Town history resides, in its present undeveloped condition.

### **History of Webster**

A complete record of Webster history might begin 4.6 billion years ago when the "Big Bang" created a vast cloud of gas and dust from which our solar system eventually coalesced. It might instead begin 650 million years ago when the first of the rocks that now shape the New Hampshire landscape were being formed. Or it might begin just 290 million years ago when the region eventually to become New England and England were adjacent south-of-the-equator parts of Pangea, a continuous land mass then incorporating all of the earth's land area. Pangea was then roamed by giant crocodile-like amphibians, and eventually split and drifted apart as the continents we know today. Perhaps our history should begin 200 million years ago with the appearance of the dinosaurs... or 60 million years ago with the appearance of the first mammals. Or 2 million years ago at the start of the Pleistocene epoch that saw New England covered by glaciers four different times, with much of coastal New Hampshire under ocean water between glacial periods. Or a mere 10,000-12,000 years ago when the first Native Americans arrived and began their own rich local history. But no... that's too broad a scope for this document. We'll leave all but the last 271 years of that 4.6-billion-year span to others and begin with the arrival of the first European settlers.

In 1733, King George II of England granted the seven-mile-square "Plantation at Contoocook" (unrelated to the later town of Contoocook) to John Coffin and 80 others, all from Newbury, Massachusetts. The area of this grant was eventually to become the towns of Boscawen and Webster.

The grant was made contingent on the establishment of 81 homesteads, the building of a meeting house, and the installation of a minister, all within 4 years. At the time, the grant and in fact all of the area west of the Merrimack River was claimed by Massachusetts and was to remain so until a dispute between New Hampshire and Massachusetts was resolved in 1740.

The first settlers arrived in the spring of 1734, and set about building log cabins, clearing fields, and putting in crops. Most were joined by their families during the summer and, by the fall, a total of 33 homesteads were in place. It had to have been a daunting undertaking. The settlement was "the outpost of civilization", with unbroken wilderness northwards to Canada. In fact, it would be another 28 years before Warner was settled and 30 years before there would be any settlements north of Salisbury.

Although it had been 37 years since Hannah Dustin, held captive by Indians in the area, had managed her brave and bloody escape, it was still 'Indian country'. Particularly from 1743 until the close of the French and Indian War in 1759, the settlement was under constant threat and periodic attack. Garrisons were built in which the settlers sought protection when threatened. Many surrounding settlements were abandoned in the face of the Indian attacks, but the Contoocook Plantation settlers refused to be intimidated and stayed put.

The first log cabin in what is now Webster is believed to be “Cook’s Cabin”, built in 1745 by Thomas Cook just west of the north end of Mutton Drive. Mr. Cook got his name on the map... Cook’s Hill (See Map3)... but did not have long to enjoy his new home. He was killed by Indians the following year. Little evidence of Cook’s Cabin remains.

In 1760, a town charter was granted and the plantation became the Town of Boscawen, named for Lord Boscawen, a hero of the English navy. At that time, framed houses had begun to replace log cabins. There were still few settlements westward of Water Street. The first school in the town was opened in 1761. By 1767, the population of the town had grown to 285... compared to 752 for Concord. By 1783, the population had increased to 756 persons in 98 dwellings. 1475 acres were devoted to tillage, pasturage, mowing, and orchards... still a tiny fraction of the 25,820 total land acres in the town.

In the years prior to the Revolutionary War, local militia mustered on Fowler’s Plain (See Map).

The revolution against English rule brought a period of turbulence and chaos, with Boscawen residents called upon to support the cause with both manpower and material. This period of uncertainty lasted until the adoption of the federal constitution in 1790.

By 1791, there was enough settlement in the western part of the town (the area eventually to become Webster) to prompt the construction of a new meeting house to serve that part of town. Five years later, again prompted by the growing population of the area, the new meeting house became home to “The Second Congregational Church of Boscawen”, a role it served until construction of the present church building in 1823.

In 1803, Boscawen and other towns competed unsuccessfully against Concord to become the state capital.

In 1826, a flood took out all of the bridges across the Blackwater River with the exception of one at Sweatt’s Mills. This flood was a precursor of bigger disasters yet to come.

On July 4th, 1860, the Town of Webster was incorporated and thereby separated from Boscawen. The town was named in honor of Daniel Webster, the famed lawyer/statesmen/legislator/orator who had been born in Salisbury and began his legal practice in Boscawen. The reasons for the separation of Webster and Boscawen seem not to have been well documented, but may have involved issues of local control and taxation. (Sound familiar?) The first Webster Town Meeting was held on August 11th of that year, with the maximum number of votes cast being 204.

At the time of its incorporation and subsequently, Webster was a rural and predominantly agricultural town. There was nevertheless a considerable amount of supporting commercial enterprise, much of it located on and often deriving power from the Blackwater River. The 1933-1983 Webster History lists no less than 22 shops and mills in the town. There were several sawmills, a shingle mill, grist and grain mills, blacksmith shops, a nail shop, a cobbler’s shop, a dry goods store, and others. Altogether a much more self-sufficient community than is now the case!

The agricultural character of the community was influenced in 1890s by the interest of Civil War naval hero Commodore George Hamilton Perkins who, during a leave of absence from his naval duties, purchased a small farm on the shore of Lake Winnepocket. This modest beginning eventually grew into a network of sixteen farms comprising about 1800 acres. Especially after

his retirement in 1891, Commodore Perkins devoted substantial energy to improving his farms. He took particular pride in his horses, of which there were about 60 at the time of his death in 1899, and several of which were champion trotters. He maintained a large workforce, contributed significantly to the Webster tax base, and was immensely popular with everyone in the region. That reputation was enhanced in 1897 when the Commodore and his wife hosted a lakeside celebration of the wedding of his daughter Isabel to Larz Anderson, an ambassador to Belgium and Tokyo under the William Howard Taft administration. Everyone within travel distance, regardless of station, was invited. 1500 guests were treated to a reception, a banquet, band music, and a fireworks display over the lake. Boston papers described the occasion as one “never to be forgotten by the New Hampshire countryside”.

A notable event each summer from 1928 to 1937 was the encampment of the 172nd Field Artillery of the National Guard in Sawyers Field (See Map) on Little Hill.

Webster was dramatically reshaped by a major flood in 1936, the great hurricane of 1938, and the consequent construction of the Blackwater Dam flood control project.

The 1936 flood, caused by torrential rains in combination with rapidly melting snow pack, took out five covered bridges crossing the Blackwater River. Only one was left, and mail service, electrical power, and telephone service were severely disrupted. Rowboats were used to cross the river until temporary replacement bridges could be built.

In 1938, an even greater flood was accompanied by hurricane-force winds that wreaked havoc with buildings and with the forest. Trees were down everywhere and roads were impassable. More than a million board feet of pine was down on the Larz Anderson estate alone. Huge quantities of pine logs were cut and floated on Lake Winnepocket until they could be sawed. A mammoth pile of sawdust next to the lake outlet is still a conspicuous reminder of the lumber milling that took place there.

When the Army Corps of Engineers responded to these disasters by building the Blackwater Dam in 1940, many of Webster’s older buildings were demolished and the Town was forever altered. The Federal Government acquired and mandated the removal of structures from approximately 3600 acres of upstream land, most of which would be submerged if water were to rise to the crest of the dam. Such cresting would create a lake almost 13 miles long, with more than 5 miles in Webster and the balance in Salisbury. Water behind the dam has been within two feet of cresting once, in 1987, but generally is far below that level. This situation creates a large undeveloped area straddling the Blackwater River, regarded by the Corps of Engineers as an “historic and culturally rich” area because of its early role in the Town. It also provides recreational opportunities including canoeing and kayaking, hiking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, hunting, and fishing.

Webster’s recent history has been characterized by decreasing agricultural activity, considerable reforestation accompanied by growth of active timber-related enterprises, rapid population growth, the disappearance of most commercial activities in Town, and a corresponding substantial shift to out-of-town employment of its residents.

The Town was alerted to the potential effects of uncontrolled development by creation in the mid-1960s of a massive subdivision in what is now the Pillsbury Lake District. Many hundreds of lots were created, almost all too small to safely accommodate the wells and septic systems upon which most Webster residents depend. The issue was partially addressed with a

community water system but, even though a great many lots are still to be developed, that system is currently at capacity. Adequate septic systems are often not feasible. To a large degree in response to the Pillsbury Lake subdivision, the Town instituted a Zoning Ordinance in 1978 and Subdivision Regulations in 1993.

The Town now faces looming development pressures as the East Coast “megalopolis” spreads northward from Boston and outward from Concord and Manchester. This Master Plan is part of a conscious effort to respond to those pressures in a manner that will retain the unique character of the town while allowing reasonable growth.

## **Historical Resources in Webster**

### **History Documentation**

Webster’s history has been well documented in a series of books:

“A Chronological Register of Boscawen” by Rev. Ebenezer Price covering the period from Boscawen’s first settlement in 1733 to 1820, printed by Jacob B. Moore in 1823.

“One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of Boscawen and Webster”, primarily a compilation of speeches given at the time of that anniversary.

“The History of Boscawen and Webster New Hampshire 1733-1878” by Charles Carleton Coffin, published by The Republican Press Association in 1878.

"The History of Boscawen and Webster, New Hampshire from 1878 to 1933" compiled by Willis G. Buxton and re-published in facsimile form by The Boscawen Historical Society in 1992.

"Webster New Hampshire, 1933-1983, History", compiled and published by the Webster History Committee in 1984.

Walter and Linnea Silver, “From the King’s Plantation to Home Town Heritage”, Peter E. Randall Publisher, 1997.

“A Visit to the Past... A Walking Tour of Old Webster Behind the Blackwater Dam”, a pamphlet created and published in 1998 by The Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House.

All of these documents are available for reference at the Webster Free Library. They paint a vivid picture of life in Webster as it evolved over the years, and are recommended reading.

Much of the historical information herein is drawn from one or more of these sources.

### **National Register of Historic Places**

Webster currently has two structures on the National Register of Historic Places... the Webster Congregational Church and the Old Webster Meeting House. Both were placed on the list in March of 1985. The location of each is shown on the Sites of Historic and Cultural Importance map.

The First Congregational Church of Webster (See Map) was originally established in 1804 as the Second Congregational Church of West Boscawen and assumed its present name in 1860 when

Webster was separated from Boscawen. Its present building was erected in 1823 by master carpenter George Pillsbury.

The Old Webster Meeting House (See Map), originally built as the Westerly Meeting House and later known as the Town House, was built in 1791 and was first used as a meeting place for religious worship. The contract for the frame of the building was let to one Samuel Jackman for the sum of \$94.00, but the work was so well done that the Town voted an additional \$16.68. The building stood on its original site, now part of the Blackwater dam flood basin, for 140 years. In 1941, it was among those buildings acquired by the Federal Government prior to construction of the dam, but then was re-purchased at auction by interested citizens (for \$105!) and moved by a windlass powered by a single horse up the hill to its present location on Battle Street. It is owned and maintained by The Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House and serves as a site for community functions and as a repository for a wide array of historical Webster artifacts.

### New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places

This is a relatively new program, with listings starting in 2001. Properties are listed at the owner's request. There are as yet no Webster Properties listed on the Register. Clearly there are some good candidates for such listing.

### Cemeteries

There are three active cemeteries in Town, all managed and cared for by an elected Cemetery Commission. Their locations are shown on the Sites of Historic and Cultural Importance map.

The Beaver Dam Cemetery (See Map) was divided equally between Webster and Boscawen when the towns were separated in 1860, even though it lies entirely in Webster. The earliest marker in this cemetery is dated 1818, and many lots are still available.

The land for the Corser Hill Cemetery (See Map) was purchased in 1910 by the Central New Hampshire power Company of Maine in anticipation of a power generation project on the Blackwater River that would necessitate moving the graves from the yard established in 1813 at the original site of the Old Meeting House. That project never materialized, but the planned move took place in 1941 when the Corps of Engineers undertook construction of the Blackwater flood control project. A total of 774 bodies were moved to the new location. In recent years, an additional portion of the property was cleared to enable future expansion.

The Riverdale Cemetery (See Map) was deeded to the Town of Boscawen in 1847 and then to the Town of Webster when the two towns separated in 1860. The earliest marker in that cemetery carries the date of 1802, but there are several unnamed and undated markers. This cemetery is at or near capacity.

There is an additional but inactive cemetery on Clough and Sanborn Hill (See Map). It was formalized by Town vote in 1871 but, since the earliest marker is dated 1802, the cemetery clearly pre-existed that vote. There are 12 headstones and several field stones marking additional graves in what is essentially a private family cemetery.

A site directly across Pleasant Street from the Corser Hill Cemetery is believed to be an Indian burial ground (See Map) ... and perhaps even the place where some early settlers were interred.

## Veterans' Memorial

A Veterans' Memorial at the junction of Allen Road and Battle Street (See Map) honors Webster residents who have served the nation's military in all major conflicts starting with World War I, with special emphasis on those who lost their lives while serving their country. The Memorial, completed in 1991, was the result of an 8-year-long planning, fund raising, and construction effort by a volunteer group of Webster veterans. It was created on donated land and replaces an earlier World War I memorial that had fallen into disrepair. A non-profit volunteer veterans group maintains and updates the Memorial. It serves as a reminder to all Webster residents of the sacrifices made on our behalf by the dedicated members of our nation's military, and especially those from Webster families.

## Historic Structures

- The Town Hall Complex (See Map)

Tangible evidence of Webster's history is embodied in the current Town Hall facility on Battle Street, the site of many municipal, civic, and social functions. Here until 1990 stood the Anderson Memorial Methodist Church and, next door, the Grange Hall.

The former church, with its striking stained glass windows, had until then been owned by the Women's Union. Their ownership of the church had been enabled by a gift from Isabel Anderson, daughter of Commodore George Hamilton Perkins, a civil war naval hero whose statue is at the capitol building in Concord. Isabel followed her father's example as a prominent early Webster resident and benefactor.

The steeple on the church fell prey to the ravages of time and the elements and had to be removed. It is currently in storage awaiting restoration. Voters have opted not to spend tax money on the project.

The Grange Hall was built and dedicated in 1884 as the home of the Daniel Webster Grange No. 100, which had been organized in town earlier that same year.

In 1990, the church and the Grange Hall were linked by a connecting building and Town offices were created on the lower level. The former church now houses the Webster Free Library. The combined facility is a "community center" for all kinds of functions including use of the Grange Hall as a polling place and the site for Town Meetings.

- One-room schoolhouses (See Map)

The early records of Webster schools prior to the 1860 incorporation of Webster as a separate town are sketchy at best, but it is evident that, prior to that date, a number of schools were in operation, probably generally located in private residences. Shortly after the separate incorporation, Town records show there were nine school districts in town, each with its own schoolhouse:

A school (Old District #1) at Sweat's Mills, after serving most recently as a Police Station, is awaiting disposition by the Town.

Schools on Pleasant Street (District #2), Corser Hill (#3), White Plain (#7, at the northerly end of Lake Winnepocket), and Putney Hill (#9) were moved to new locations (#9 in Hopkinton) and converted to private residences.

Schools on Battle Street (#4) and Clough and Sanborn Hill (#5) fell into disrepair and no longer exist.

The school on Little Hill (#6) served as a private residence until lost to fire in 2004.

The school at Bashan Hollow remains at its original location and now serves as private residence.

All of the one-room schools were superceded in 1952 by the opening of the Webster Central School (See Map), the current elementary school across from the Town Hall complex.

- Churches

The First Congregational Church of Webster, on Long Street, is described under the National Register of Historic Places heading. Next to the church is the parish house (See Map), built in 1780, occupied by early settler John Corser, and eventually acquired by the Church.

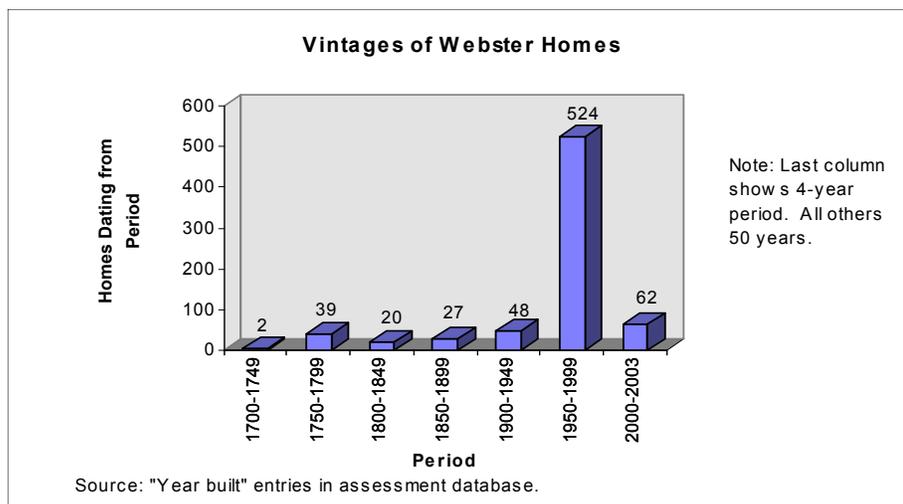
As noted above, the current library was once a Methodist church and is still notable for its stained glass windows.

- Barns

There are several old barns in Webster that may be of historical note and worthy of preservation. Examples include those owned by the Van Loans on Gerrish Road and the Taylors on Battle Street. There seemingly has been no systematic effort to inventory old barns in Town and to evaluate their potential historical significance.

- Historic Homes

The following chart shows that, although there has been a continuing surge in home construction in Webster since 1950, there are still significant numbers of older homes in town. 88 of them predate 1900, 41 predate 1800, and 2 predate 1750.



Many of these older homes are listed and described in the Webster, New Hampshire 1933-1983 History book. One of particular note, on Potash Road, is the circa 1800 former home of Rev. Edward Buxton, who served as pastor of the church for 50 years. The building was willed to the

Church by his daughter Elizabeth, was used as a parsonage for many years, and is now a private home.

These older homes constitute a significant resource and contribute substantially to the character of the town. Their protection and preservation should be encouraged.

Many of Webster's early structures have fallen victim to fire or the ravages of time. Evidence of some of them still exists in the form of old cellar holes. Buxton's History of Boscawen and Webster cataloged such cellar holes in 1933, and much of the information therein is still valid.

### Old Stone Walls

A striking feature of the landscape in Webster and all of New England is the network of stone walls built, primarily in the years following the Revolutionary War, by industrious farmers. The magnitude of this effort was staggering. It has been estimated that, by the 1870s, more than 240,000 miles of such walls had been built in New England... enough to reach from the earth to the moon. A short walk or drive anywhere in Town shows that Webster contributed at least its share to this total.

The primary motivation for building those walls was the need to remove from fields enough of the stony rubble left behind by the retreating glacier to permit access by plow and scythe. The slight additional effort required to stack the rock in linear piles brought fringe benefits in the form of livestock containment and property line delineation. Those functions could have been achieved far more simply were it not for the need to rid the fields of stone!

Old stone walls continue to flank many of Webster's roads and define longstanding property boundaries. Others wander through the woods in paths the purposes of which are no longer apparent.

These old walls are the most extensive and conspicuous relics of Webster's agricultural origins. They have become a signature feature of our terrain, and a significant contributor to the rural landscape on which Webster residents have placed high value. They deserve protection and preservation.

There are at least two threats to our old stone walls:

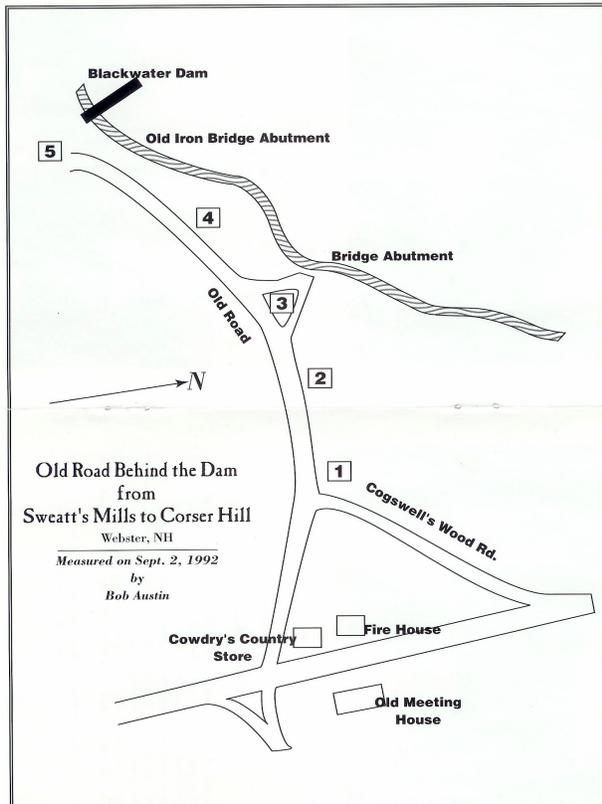
Old walls often do not fit well with new boundary lines or new land uses, and are bulldozed into oblivion as a matter of insensitive convenience.

Although not yet a major factor in Webster, the growing market for stone has created a thriving industry in which old walls are "mined", either legally or illegally, and the stone trucked away to sometimes distant destinations.

Webster will be well served by efforts to minimize the extent to which these threats are allowed to impact our historic stone walls and thus our valued rural atmosphere.

### Historic Markers

In recognition that the area behind the Blackwater Dam was once alive with homes, farms, and industry, a series of five numbered granite markers records the sites of some of the structures that were lost. A pamphlet published by The Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House facilitates a walking tour of these sites and documents their history. The following figure, extracted from that pamphlet, shows the five sites. These markers and the associated documentation are important records of an earlier time.



Marker #1 – Original site of Old Meeting House

Marker #2 – Stebbin’s Store

Marker #3 – Burbank’s Bridge

Marker #4 – Burbank’s Sawmill

Marker #5 – Hearse House

### Historic Roads

Many of Webster’s roadways have significant histories. An example: Dublin Road, a portion of Little Hill Road, and the partially discontinued Province Road were parts of a highway intended to connect Boscawen with Fort No. 4 in Charlestown, called in its entirety “The Province Road” and intended to become the first east-west highway across the State. An act directing the construction of this highway was passed by the State in 1769 after years of wrangling. Webster complied with the State’s mandate, but it’s not clear how much of the rest of this highway was actually built.

### Historic District

Webster does not now have a designated historic district. Such a district could be created to increase awareness of and to facilitate preservation of some of Webster’s more important historical features. Designation of such a district would require creation of a historic district commission, in accordance with RSA 673:1-II.

## Historic Preservation and Information Resources

There are many sources of historical information available about the Town of Webster, both in the Town itself and in outside repositories. The following is a partial list of available organizations and their resources, as they relate to the historical resources of Webster.

- The Society for the Protection of the Old Meeting House

The Society maintains a growing collection of records and objects related to the history of Webster. This collection provides valuable insight into the forces that have shaped the nature and character of our Town.

- Webster Town Hall Records

The Webster Town Hall contains many historical documents and records. These records are quite complete starting in 1977, when the Town Hall function was formally constituted and sometimes partial for the period from the 1860 charter date until 1977. These records include: tax maps, other old maps, deeds and property sales information, Town Reports (complete from 1900, some from 1860-1899), Town Clerk records, meeting minutes from various boards, vital records and statistics, invoice records beginning in the 1800s (these list property owners, number of livestock, and the taxes owed), and much more. All of this information is available to the public for research and review.

It should be noted that, while most of these records are normally stored in a vault room, many exist nowhere else and could be lost in the event of a major fire or other disaster.

- Webster Free Library

As previously noted, the Webster library contains a number of historical documents that pertain to the Town of Webster and the surrounding area.

- New Hampshire Historical Society

The New Hampshire Historical Society, in Concord, is an independent, nonprofit organization and is accredited by the American Association of Museums. The services and resources the New Hampshire Historical Society provides include the Museum of New Hampshire History, the Tuck Library, a museum store, a newsletter and quarterly calendar, and technical assistance to local libraries, historical organizations, and citizens.

- New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources

The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources in Concord was established in 1974 as the "State Historic Preservation Office." The resources and materials available at the NHDHR include National Register of Historic Places criteria; New Hampshire historical marker programs; the offices of the State Architectural Historian, State Curator, State Archeologist; preservation tax incentive programs; historical survey programs; and grant programs.

- New Hampshire State Library

The New Hampshire State Library houses approximately 2,400 titles of published family histories for New Hampshire and New England. This collection is enhanced by the unique name index to early town records on microfilm. The town records, ranging in years for each town, but falling roughly between the years 1640-1830/1840, can provide birth, death, and marriage dates, as well as a listing of such items as tax inventories. Other major resources available include

town and county histories, annual town reports, Federal Census records for New Hampshire (1790-1920), local newspapers on microfilm, the genealogical column of the "Boston Transcript," legislative biographies (1890 +), city and county directories, and military records.

### **Cultural Resources in Webster**

#### **School**

Webster schoolchildren attend elementary school (Kindergarten through Grade 5) in Town, across the street from Town Hall, and then travel to regional schools for continuing education. The Webster school and the regional schools are part of the Merrimack Valley School District managed by a Board of Education that is independent of the Town government.

#### **Library**

The Webster Free Public Library ("The Library"), managed by an elected Board of Trustees, first opened in 1894 with 102 volumes received from the New Hampshire State Library. Before moving to its present location, it was housed in turn in the Old Meeting House, the Sweatt's Mills Store, and the building across Battle Street occupied until 2003 by the Police Department. At times, parts of the collection were housed in private homes because of space limitations. The Library serves all Webster residents with a collection that has grown to more than 9,000 volumes supplemented by an array of videos, audios, and internet resources. The Library maintains a close relationship with the elementary school across the street, serving as a significant resource for the students. As noted in the Community Facilities chapter, the Library is already hard pressed to supply these services in the presently available space.

#### **The Old Meeting House – as a Museum**

The growing and varied collection of historical items housed at the Old Meeting House paints a vivid picture of what Webster life was like in earlier times. It helps us to understand the people and the culture that led to the Town we know today.

The scope of this facility is now being expanded, with the recent acquisition of the old fire station, across the street from the Meeting House. This added space will enable additional exhibition areas and improved meeting facilities.

#### **Service and Charitable Organizations**

Much of Webster's character is attributable to an active network of service and charitable organizations.

The First Congregational Church of Webster was originally established in 1804 as the Second Congregational Church of Boscawen and assumed its present name in 1860 when Webster was separated from Boscawen. Its present building was erected in 1823 by master carpenter George Pillsbury and, as noted above, is listed in the National Register of Historical Places. The church congregation is a part of the United Church of Christ and plays an important role in the life of its members and the community. A significant portion of church funding comes from operation of a permanent food booth at the Hopkinton Fairgrounds.

Daniel Webster Grange, Number 100, was organized in 1884 and built the Grange Hall in that same year. The Grange to this day is an active participant in the affairs of the Town and maintains a high, state-wide reputation for its charitable and service activities.

The Women's Union has operated since 1929 in a variety of charitable and public service roles.

These three organizations jointly offer a highly popular series of public suppers at the Town Hall, sharing equally in the income so generated.

Also meeting regularly in Webster is a group observing the Baha'i faith.

Webster citizens of other faiths attend churches and synagogues in surrounding towns.

Webster has a chapter of the New Hampshire Circle of Home & Family (NHCHF), a women's group originally a part of the UNH Cooperative Extension service. The group extends its interest internationally through its membership in the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW). Open to all Webster women, the NHCHF focuses on education and personal growth of its members.

4-H groups, both Webster-based and in the region, provide important educational and developmental opportunities for Webster youths, particularly in the agricultural areas that are such an important part of Webster's past and present.

An Old Home Day Committee organizes an annual celebration of the Town's heritage, continuing a tradition begun in 1899 when former residents were invited to return to Town to re-establish ties and friendships.

#### Communication and Local News Dissemination

Webster is served to an extent by coverage in the Concord Monitor and other news media in the region, but has come to depend on The Webster Grapevine for detailed coverage of local news and activities. The Grapevine is a privately owned monthly newsletter but nonetheless serves an important role in disseminating information regarding Town activities. If it were for any reason to cease publication, there would be a significant gap in residents' ability to stay abreast of Town matters.

The Town has recently established a Town Website. This represents another means for information dissemination, at least for those residents with web access. It should become an increasingly useful tool as the site is expanded.

#### Spirit of Volunteerism

An underlying theme of Webster's culture is a pervasive spirit of volunteerism. Municipal, charitable, social, and recreational functions all rely heavily on volunteer participation. This is the source of considerable citizen pride, as evidenced by the "Home of the Professional Volunteers" sign on the church booth at the fairgrounds and by the "Volunteers – Proud to Serve" sign over the fire truck bays of the new public safety building.

A relevant quote in the 1951 Town Report, commenting on the community support that had made possible the new elementary school: "There is a spirit in Webster that is found in few towns. I am not sure how to describe it. It is a feeling of closeness to our neighbors, a willingness to lend a hand, and the spirit of working together to get things done. One thing I am sure of, this is a wonderful thing, this spirit you have in Webster. I hope you will never lose it."

Webster would be a very different place without this spirit. Growth will inevitably make this spirit more difficult to maintain, but it should be fostered and promoted in every possible way.

## **Resources Available for Meeting Historical and Cultural Resource Needs**

Webster has a rich historical legacy that is evident in its buildings, landscapes, and patterns of development. This legacy contributes to the quality of life in the community and provides a sense of identity that many residents enjoy and find important. The resources listed below are potential tools for protecting and preserving this legacy for enjoyment by and education of future generations.

Barn Owner Tax Relief: RSA 79-D authorizes municipalities to grant property tax relief to barn owners who can demonstrate the public benefit of preserving their building and who also agree to maintain their structure throughout a minimum 10-year preservation easement. The law encourages barn owners to maintain and repair their buildings by granting them specific tax relief and assuring them that tax assessments will not be increased as a result of new repair work.

Certified Local Governments Program: The "Certified Local Governments" (CLG) program, enacted by the National Historic Preservation Act Amendments of 1980, is a partnership between municipal governments and the State historic preservation program, to encourage and expand local involvement in preservation-related activities. To be certified, a town must:

- 1) Enforce appropriate state or local legislation for designation and protection of historic properties (this means that the community must have a legally-adopted Historic District, and adequate regulations for administering the District Ordinance);
- 2) Establish an adequate and qualified Historic Preservation Review Commission (Historic District Commission or Heritage Commission, with Historic District responsibilities) under state law and local ordinance;
- 3) Maintain a system for the survey and inventory of historic properties;
- 4) Provide for adequate public participation in the local historic preservation program, including the process of recommending properties for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places; and,
- 5) Satisfactorily perform the responsibilities delegated to it by the State of Historic Preservation Officer under P.L. 96-515.

Local governments that are certified have specific responsibilities for review of National Register of Historic Places nominations for all properties within their community, not just within a historic district; they participate in the development of regional and statewide historic preservation goals; and they are eligible to apply for federal matching grants from a special "pass-through" fund set aside for the exclusive use of CLGs.

Citizens for New Hampshire's Land and Community Heritage: A coalition of organizations that are working to protect the special places that define our state. Technical assistance, outreach, and education are available to communities.

Cooperative Ventures with Private Organizations: When the interests of the Town to conserve historic or cultural resources match with the interests of a private organization, the potential for a cooperative partnership exists. This tactic will require some creative thinking and introductory discussions by Town officials with area organizations that have, or could develop, an interest in conserving such resources.

Grants from Foundations: The Town should research available grants and develop proposals to seek funding to conserve particular pieces of property or types of historic resources within Town. Funding could be sought from foundations at the local, state, regional, and national level.

Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP): This State fund is designed to assist communities that want to conserve outstanding natural, historic, and cultural resources.

There is a requirement that the Towns match the State money from this fund with a 50% match from other sources, some of which can be an "in kind" match, as well as funds from other sources.

Land Trust: The Town should support non-profit land trusts that accept and pursue property and easements for land of local historic and cultural concern.

New Hampshire Main Street Center: Dedicated specifically to maintaining, strengthening, and revitalizing the physical, economic, and cultural characteristics of the state's traditional and historic downtown urban and village centers by supporting and working with Main Street programs. The Center provides technical assistance, education, and outreach to interested communities. Funding is also available to eligible communities.

New Hampshire Preservation Alliance: The Alliance was founded in 1985 and works to preserve New Hampshire's historic buildings, landscapes, and communities through leadership, advocacy, and education.

Preservation Easements: Preservation easements are initiated by landowners who wish to protect their land from future development, while still retaining owner's rights. Farms, buildings, and scenic and historic areas all may be protected by easements. Perpetual easements protect the land or structure through subsequent owners, while term easements have a set time period agreed to by the town and current owner. Perpetual easements often reduce the estate tax on large amounts of property, though the decision to award tax relief is officially decided by State Law, local officials, and town assessors.

Revolving Funds: Revolving funds help protect and preserve publicly significant historic properties by using options to purchase, direct acquisition, or deed of gift to acquire threatened or endangered properties. Profits from the sales are rolled back into the fund to help save other endangered properties and perpetuate the fund. The National Preservation Loan provides loans to establish or expand local and statewide preservation revolving funds.

State Historic Markers: The Historical Marker Program is one way that New Hampshire remembers its past. The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources is responsible for approving the subject, location, wording, and accuracy of the state markers. The authorizing official of the historical marker program is the Commissioner of Transportation, who has the power to erect up to ten markers per year. The only way a marker can be placed in a Town is in response to a proposal and petition of twenty signatures from concerned citizens. These markers can be erected on State and local roads. However, the initial costs of the markers and on-going maintenance are local responsibilities.

Tax Rehabilitation Credits and Incentives: Income tax deductions may be granted for two types of historic properties, a historically important area, or a certified historic structure. A twenty percent tax credit is given by the government for rehabilitation of certified historic structures. The Bank of America Historic Tax Credit Fund grants equity investments for the rehabilitation

of historic commercial and residential properties eligible for the federal and state historic tax credit, as well as the 10% non-historic federal tax credit.

Transportation Enhancement Funds (TE): Funding for the TE program is slightly more than \$3 million dollars annually. These funds are provided in an 80/20 match, with the State paying for the majority of the project cost. Typical examples of projects eligible for TE funds include:

Acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites

Scenic or historic highway programs

Historic preservation

Rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures, facilities

Preservation of abandoned railway corridors

Archaeological planning and research

Establishment of transportation museums

### **Issues, Goals, and Suggestions**

The underlying issue relevant to historic and cultural resources is the threat that the Town will lose track of its historical heritage, be overrun by rampant growth, lose its unique character, and become just a faceless part of urban sprawl.

Development pressures, population growth, and the passage of time all serve to diminish individual and collective memories and to foster gradual disappearance or degradation of both tangible and intangible historic resources. Such losses will inevitably alter the character and culture of the Town in ways contrary to the wishes of its residents, as expressed by the Community Survey results.

It should be a goal of the community to preserve insofar as practical the historical foundation on which Webster's character has been built, and use that foundation as a basis for guiding the evolution of the Town in the face of the inevitable growth pressures.

There is a Webster History Committee that, in 1984, published the most recent history of Webster. However, that committee is currently relatively inactive except for an annual contribution to the Town Report, summarizing the year's events and happenings. The **general suggestion** presented herein is that the History Committee be reinvigorated, charged with achieving the above goal, and tasked with working in cooperation with the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals to develop a plan for implementation of the following **detailed suggestions**:

The History Committee should investigate the possibility of replacing the Committee with a Heritage Commission, in accordance with RSA 673:4.a, 674:44-a, 674:44-b, 674:44-c, and 674:44-d. The Committee should recommend an appropriate warrant article if they deem such a commission to be desirable.

The Library trustees and staff should undertake an inventory of material in the Library relevant to Webster history and develop a plan to protect, enhance, and publicize that material.

The Library trustees or the Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House should initiate an effort to locate residents, particularly those with direct memories of Webster history, who can contribute documents and/or taped recollections to the Library's collection. A number of

recorded interviews with older residents already exist in private hands. They should be added to the Library's and/or the Meeting House's collection and, if possible, transcribed.

The History Committee should explore the possibility of placing additional features on the National and/or the State Register of Historic Places. Possibilities include the Town Hall complex, the trail of historic markers in the Blackwater flood plain, and some of the older homes in Town.

The History Committee should study the advisability of establishing a historic district, and a Historic District Commission to manage it, in accordance with relevant RSAs.

The History Committee should inventory antique homes and barns in Town, evaluate them for historical significance, and seek means to document their history and encourage their preservation.

The Planning Board, in response to this Master Plan, should update the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision Regulations as appropriate to protect and honor historic structures, old stone walls, and their environs.

Similarly, the Zoning Board of Adjustment should emphasize the importance of preserving and protecting historic structures and their environs when faced with issues affecting such structures.

Town Hall staff should inventory records of historical interest at Town Hall. Those found to be unique should be copied to microfilm or compact disks and those copies stored in a separate facility.

The History Committee should systematically review the preceding section on Resources Available for Meeting Historical and Cultural Resource Needs to determine which of the listed resources might be relevant to Webster needs and how best to employ them.

The Selectmen should remain alert for any indication that the Corps of Engineers is contemplating any change in the status of the Blackwater Recreation Area, and be prepared to communicate to the Corps the overwhelming opposition of Webster residents to any such change.

All Town functions should seek every opportunity to encourage, promote, recognize, and reward the spirit of volunteerism that is so important to the character and culture of the Town.

### **Summary**

The purpose of historic preservation is to enrich contemporary life and culture by retaining historical assets and safeguarding them for the future. Often when people think of historic resources they think of one handsome old house, a cemetery, or site of a famous event. The historic resources of Webster are much broader than individual buildings or sites. "Historic" encompasses space as well as buildings. The term includes farms and barns, churches, town centers, streetscapes, bridges, streets, stonewalls - in short, the architectural, cultural, and aesthetic heritage of the community.

Historic resources are among a community's most significant and fragile assets. They give character and memory to a place. They are easily violated, blighted, or destroyed by any development that is insensitive to their importance. Webster should actively ensure that its historic and cultural resources are protected, enhanced, maintained, and preserved.

This Chapter seeks to promote that concept and to provide corresponding guidance to the selectmen, the land use boards, Town employees, citizens, and volunteers.

Historic and cultural preservation is part of an overall plan to promote a sense of community and general welfare in Webster.