

## Becket Center Rural Historic District

Main Street, Rt. 8, and YMCA Road

42° 17'04.05"N 73° 03'50.17"W elevation 1588 feet

\*Private  
Property  
Please do not  
trespass.

Becket Center's historic district played a major role as the town's main settlement center from 1756 to the 1840s. It was both the spiritual and political center of the frontier community. The **Becket Center Rural Historic District**, created in 1982, includes approximately 40 acres of gently rolling land with eight buildings, one structure ([Becket Town Pound](#)), three unexcavated historic archaeological sites (tavern, store, tan yard), a parade ground/common, and a cemetery, all located along Main Street (Rt. 8), Hamilton Road and Y.M.C.A. Road. Federal and Greek Revival period farmhouses and public buildings define the architectural character of the district. Becket's rural designation was difficult to obtain because of its bucolic nature; unlike most other more developed historic districts. Becket Center Rural Historic District was the first rural district in the state.

The town of Becket was originally named "**Plantation Number Four**," one of four granted by the Massachusetts General Court, between the Connecticut and Housatonic Rivers in 1735. The grant provided a group of proprietors ownership and full powers to establish a government; and to partition individual plots of land included in the original Plantation No. 4 designated 8 x 4 miles.

The earliest settlers of Becket traveled the Native American trail through the Green Woods from Blandford down the present Bonny Rigg Hill Road. However, the lack of a good east-west road and disturbance in the Massachusetts frontier, caused by the French and Indian War in the late 1750's, delayed permanent settlement until 1755.

Prior to incorporation on **June 21, 1765**, Becket was required to construct a gristmill (1753) for grinding grains into flour and feed, and a sawmill (about 1755) for cutting logs into building lumber. Both mills were built along Walker Brook near today's Route 20, 3 miles south from the old Becket Center, now the **Becket Center Rural Historic District**. In addition, the town needed a Meeting House (1762-1764) for religious and public gatherings; a burying ground [Becket Center Cemetery](#) (1756) and [Becket Town Pound](#) (1768) were also vital. The return of Becket Center to woodland has provided an ideal setting for the Y.M.C.A. camps, Camp Becket and Camp Chimney Corners.

Ultimately the natural advantages of the Becket Center site which offered timber, land for grazing and agriculture, as well as water power for industry, overcame the Walker Brook area for settlement. Much of the Center had been cleared for agriculture and the charcoal industry; now brush and forest have grown back. Today old stone walls clearly reveal the agricultural nature of the early occupation.

In addition to individual articles found on the [Historical Facts](#) page, the District also includes the following features:

The **Old Becket Center Post Office\*** located between the [Becket Town Pound](#) and [Guild Hall](#) was constructed in 1857 and rebuilt in 1892. It was used as a post office from 1908 – 1927. The lot was settled by Benoni Messenger in 1756 and was once the site of the Messenger Tavern and later a stage stop. The Pittsfield County Road connecting Blandford, Becket and Pittsfield traversed the area.

The **Becket Center School House, District No. 1\*** (1814-1918), was built on the north side of Y.M.C.A. Road. The original 18' x 24', 1 ½ story building has been altered with the addition of two ells, a porch and entry; it is now a private residence. Town meetings were often held here.

The **Snow-Bennett House\*** was built around 1800 by S. C. Snow, a grandson of Asa Snow who came to Becket in 1770. Originally this was a 1 ½ story, Federal period Cape with a central chimney, and a five-bay front with a center entry. It was extensively rebuilt in the 1920s-1930s.

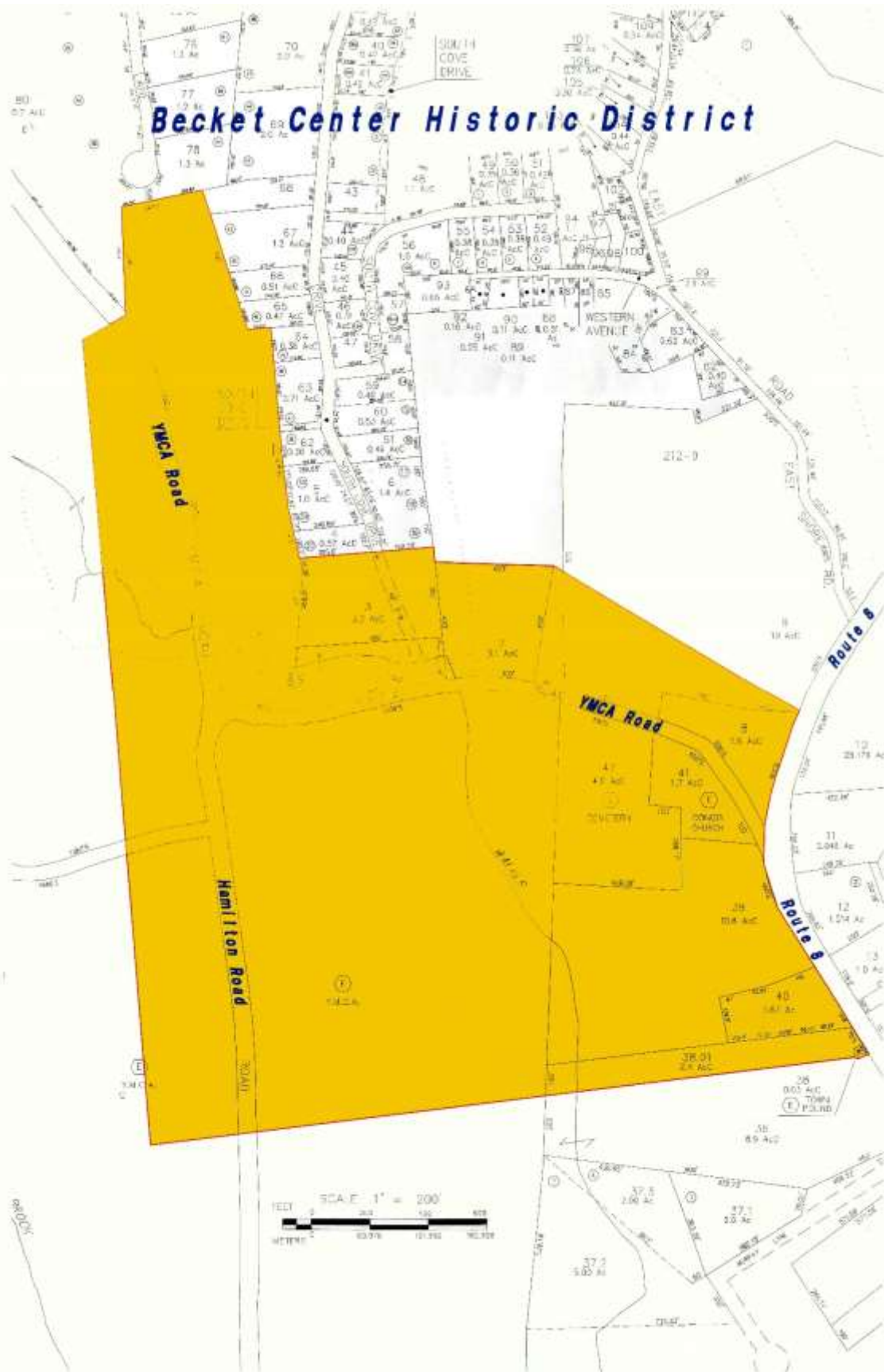
The **Cellar Hole\*** of a small building, associated with and across from the Brewster House, was the site of the Williams Store around 1820. It measures 24' x 26' and is seven feet deep. Another 9' x 26' portion of the building did not have a cellar. The store offered household and agricultural supplies to the local residents.

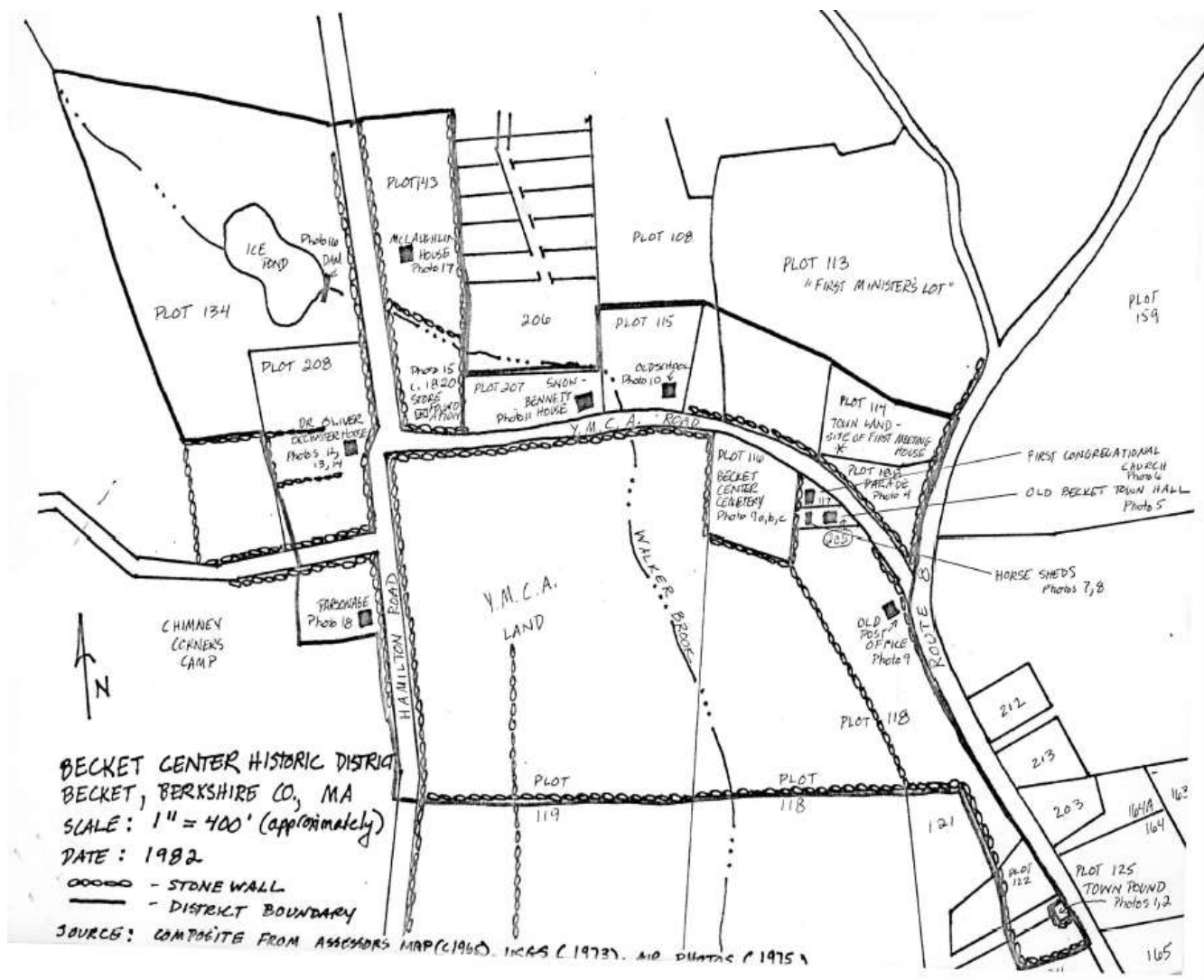
A 2 ½ acre **Ice Pond\***, north of the Brewster House has a dry laid stone dam 96' 8" long and 8' wide with a spillway. Ice was harvested from the pond in the winter for cooling during the year. Today the water feeds a small stream which flows under Hamilton Road and joins Walker Brook. An unidentified cellar hole and the dam at the south end of the pond were perhaps associated with a tan yard or other unidentified industry.

The **McLaughlin House\***, built circa 1790, is a 2 ½ story informal Georgian structure with a central chimney, five-bay façade, and sloping gable roof. It is located on the north side of Y.M.C.A. Road, across from the Ice Pond. Its design is similar in structure to the [Dr. Oliver Brewster House](#), together they are among the earliest structures in town.

Becket Center developed quickly from its beginning in the 1760s until the 1840s when the arrival of the railroad (1842) in the northeast corner of town shifted settlement to North Becket ([North Becket Village Historic District](#).)







For further information email the Becket Historical Commission:

[historical@townofbecket.org](mailto:historical@townofbecket.org)