

North Becket Historic District

Main Street, High Street, and Pleasant Street

Around 42° 19'51.66"N 73° 04'59.52"W elevation 1224-1360 feet

*Private
Property
Please do not
trespass.

The North Becket Historic District created in 1988, is a 40-acre area in the northeast corner of Becket. It is located in a valley formed by the union of Yokum Brook, the West Branch of the Westfield River, and the surrounding hills. The district is composed mostly of residences but also has a group of religious and civic buildings, and extends along the primary north-south corridor formed by Main (Rt. 8) and High Streets.

The district originally contained 47 buildings, 35 of which contributed to its architectural and historic value and one site ([Berkshire and Becket Silk Mill Ruins](#)). Most of the Greek Revival construction occurred in a twenty-year period after the arrival of the railroad in 1842; causing a shift in population from West Becket and Becket Center to the village in North Becket. Industry, commerce, social, educational and religious activity clustered in the new hub.

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-mile area. The disturbance in the Massachusetts frontier, caused by the French and Indian War in the late 1750s, delayed permanent settlement until 1755 and incorporation until 1765.

In the early 1800s prosperity and economic development led to the spread of small craft shops and factories along the waterways, including in North Becket. The economy relied on lumber and wood products from the heavily wooded area. Sawmills were constructed on the town streams, and charcoal burning was a significant industry. Reuben Smith constructed a saw mill about 1820, and subsequently added carding (separating threads before spinning), dressing (tanning leather) and wood turning (lathe) operations. The North Becket area became known as "Dish Hollow" for the many bowl turners. Among other local products were wooden clothes hangers and chairs.

During the 1840s, economic interests saw the advantage of the North Becket location with its water supply and railroad; processing plants clustered along the eastern bank of Yokum Brook and the West Branch confluence. The largest of these were the tanneries first established by William Barnard in 1841, later purchased and enlarged by William Claflin and J. W. Wheeler in 1848. Raw animal hides were carefully scraped clean, then soaked for several days in a caustic lime solution to remove the hair or fur. Next clean river water was used to flush the hides before being pickled or tanned, in a strong solution of hemlock bark containing tannin. After another rinse and partial drying, the hide was pulled and stretched until it was fully dry and pliable to make leather goods. The local saw mills provided the bark until the 1880s when Becket's hills were stripped of hemlock trees and the bark became scarce.

In the 1880s Becket along with other Berkshire County towns became a resort destination. Originally visitors boarded with families, from 1878-1940 some stayed at the Claflin House a hotel on the site of the present Becket Washington School, and some bought their own homes or built estates in town.

The North Becket Historic District also includes three important institutional buildings. The Baptists were the first to anticipate the reorientation of the town near the railroad depot. In 1844, they built their new Baptist Meetinghouse ([Becket Federated Church](#)) and in 1850 the new Congregational Society was formed and built the North Congregational Meetinghouse ([Becket Athenaeum](#)), both on Main Street. Seminary Hall ([Becket Arts Center](#)), a 2 ½ story, elaborate school and community building was built in 1855 on Brooker Hill Road directly behind the North Congregational Church.

A major change to the Village came in 1927 when the dam at the former Claflin-Wheeler reservoir (at the time owned by J.C. Ballou), a mile and half south of the Village, broke after days of heavy rain. A 25-foot-high, 150-yard-wide surge of water raced down Yokum Brook along Main Street toward the Village, leaving a 30-foot-deep gully, 100-feet-wide. Bridges, stores, factories and homes were destroyed; 31 homes were damaged and long stretches of Route 8 and 3 miles of railroad tracks were erased. The primary industrial



establishments of the district, the Berkshire and Becket Silk Mill ([Berkshire and Becket Silk Mill Ruins](#)), the Ballou Grist Mill, and the W. D. Ballou Basket Works were washed away. The present Bidwell Park ([Bidwell Park](#)) and Ballou Memorial Park ([Ballou Memorial Park](#)), small, narrow parks along Yokum Brook were donated by the families where their businesses once stood before the flood.



Unfortunately, few industrial structures survived the flood of 1927. The ***Higley Apothecary** (1857) along the railroad tracks on Pleasant Street was a local drugstore from 1870-1927. It had an apartment ell destroyed in the flood; a portion was used as a barber shop. From 1928 to about 1964, skilled craftsman Patrick Tobin, a veteran manager at the Ballou's



basket factory, made his own baskets here. The building is still standing (2021) but is in poor condition. The Ballou ***Basket Drying Shed** (ca.1860), on Prentice Place, is the last remaining structure from the basket factory; it has been remodeled and is now a private residence.

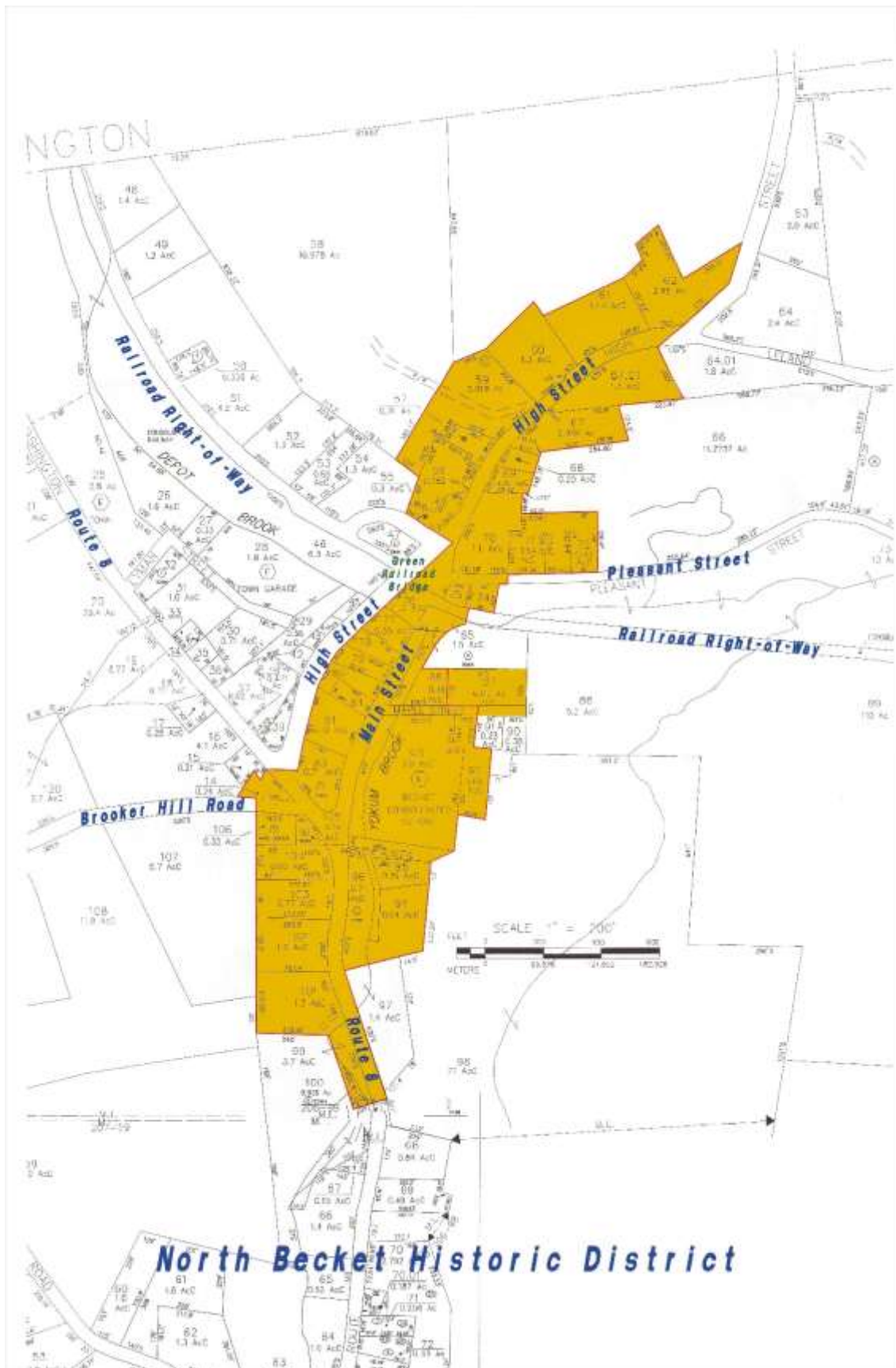


In 1928, H. Cerelia Snow bequeathed her family home on Pleasant St. to the Becket Athenaeum. This was the second location for the Athenaeum, the ***Snow Library** was in use until 1964.



The ***Higley-Jennings-Tobin-Davis** Greek Revival house on Pleasant St. was built about 1838. The two sides of the building were at times owned by different people. Patrick Tobin owned the right side of the house for forty years. At one time the building included three separate apartments making it possibly the first "condominium" in Becket.

Please see the map and list of individual places with their location and dates on the following pages 3-5:



North Becket Village Historic District
District Data Sheet

<u>Map#</u>	<u>MIC#</u>	<u>Historic Name</u>	<u>Street Address</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>	<u>Style</u>	<u>Resource/Status</u>
92	31	Jonathan W. Wheeler House	Main Street	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	C/B
91	32	J. B. Colt/Becket House Barn	Main Street	ca. 1850 1898	Colonial Revival	C/B C/B
90	33	Cheeseman House	Main Street	1845	Greek Re	
88	33a	Stanley House and Barn	Main Street	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	2C/D
85	43	Congregational Parsonage	Brooker Hill Road	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	C/B
87	34	North Congregational Church/Athenaeum	Main Street	1850	Greek Revival	C/B
86	35	Seminary Hall/Arts Center	Brooker Hill Road	1855	Greek Revival	C/B
129	36	Becket Baptist/ Federated Church	Main Street	1844	Greek Revival	C/B
130	37	Dr. Combs House	Main Street	ca. 1845	Greek Revival	C/B
131	44	McCormick House	Main Street	ca. 1845	Greek Revival	C/B
132	45	Miss Church's Barn	Main Street	ca. 1850	n/a	C/B
A	46	Frank Prontice House and Garage	Main Street	1927	Bungalow	2NC/D
133	47	Bidwell House	Main Street	ca. 1845	Greek Revival	C/B
134	48	Norcott House	Main Street	ca. 1845	Greek Revival	C/B
154	49a	Higley House	Main Street	ca. 1855	Greek Revival	C/B



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B	40c	U.S. Post Office	Main Street	1927	Modern	NC/B
C	49b	Raymond's Store	Main Street	1927	Modern	NC/B
45		Becket Silk Mill Site	Main Street	1912	n/a	C/Si
D		Ballou Park World War I Monument World War II Monument Vietnam War Flag Pole	Main Street	1935 1985	n/a	NC/Si 3NC/O
43	46	Prentice House	Prentice Place	1860	Greek Revival	C/B
42	52	Basket Shop Shed	Prentice Place	ca. 1860	Colonial	C/B
E	53	Becket Consolidated School	Maple Street	1939	Colonial Revival	NC/B
39	54	Willis House	Maple Street	ca. 1860	Greek Revival	C/B
34	55	Baptist Parsonage	Maple Street	1850	Greek Revival	C/B
32		Bidwell Park	Main Street	1929	n/a	NC/Si
31	40c	Higley Apothecary Shop	Pleasant Street	1857	Greek Revival	C/B
28	64	Wright-Barnes House	Pleasant Street	ca. 1889	n/a	C/B
27	40a	H. Corelia Snow House	Pleasant Street	ca. 1860	Greek Revival	C/B
30	40d	Jennings-Tobin-Davis House	Pleasant Street	1830	Greek Revival	C/B
F		Railroad Overpass	High Street	1939	n/a	NC/St
G	56	Ariel Raymond House and Garage	High Street	ca. 1930	Bungalow	2NC/B
H	57	Phil Raymond House and Garage	High Street	ca. 1910	Bungalow	2NC/B
9	58	S. W. Taylor House and Garage	High Street	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	C/B NC/B
8	40b	The Long House and Garage	High Street	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	C/B NC/B
13	59	Kames-Molineaux House and Garage	High Street	ca. 1860	Greek Revival	C/B NC/B
14	60	Pomeroy-Spencer House and Barn	High Street	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	4C/B
29	61	Rogers House	High Street	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	C/B
26	62	McCarthy House	High Street	ca. 1860	n/a	C/B
25	63	Messenger Homestead and Barn	High Street	ca. 1850	Greek Revival	2C/B
<u>Key</u>				<u>District Totals</u>		
C....contributing				Contributing: 35B, 15I		
NC....noncontributing				Noncontributing: 12B, 25I, 15t, 30		
B....building						
St....structure						
Si....site						
O....object						

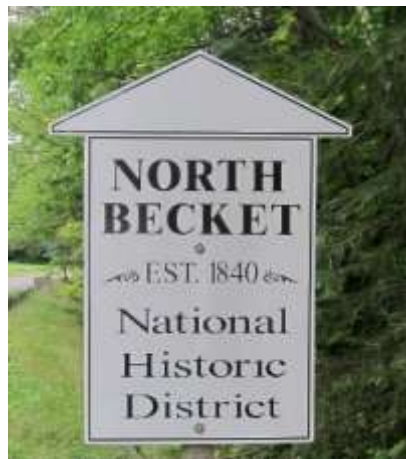
MACRIS ([Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System](http://www.mass.gov/macr)) allows you to search the Massachusetts Historical Commission database for information on historic properties and areas in the Commonwealth. You can search on Becket to find 148 historic properties. These are not all the historic properties in town but many of them.



Main Street before the Flood of 1927.



Main Street after the devastation of the Flood of 1927.



For further information email the Becket Historical Commission:

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