

# HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## BACKGROUND

The Master Plan of 2000 expressed concern for preservation of Rochester's ties to the past. Concerns existed for saving the physical manifestations of former times such as buildings and stonewalls. Concerns also existed for possible fading of public awareness of the history and appreciation of the remaining manifestations of earlier features such as saw mills and stagecoach roads.

These concerns are still very real. In fact they are probably more severe than last identified as ever more people are almost totally focused on earning a living and caring for family.

Compounding the appreciation for artifacts is that many very interesting features "left over" from past paradigms are on private property and the owners seldom appreciate intrusions to their privacy.

Evidence of old mills and stage coach roads, long abandoned foundation holes or discontinued public roads are around but each interested individual must ferret out the information and personally befriend the owner. This is worth the effort but it takes genuine interest to get started.

Rochester has succeeded in forming a Rochester Center Historic District and achieved an act of the Massachusetts legislature to declare Marion Road, Rounseville Road, Robinson Road and portions of Cushman Road (in combination, this constitutes Route 105

for those who choose to by-pass local flavor for State designations) as a Scenic Way.

## A BRIEF ROCHESTER HISTORY

Rochester's history can be traced back to seasonal native American settlements most likely located around the three major freshwater ponds and the moderate uplands of what is now the town center. Native Americans sought the more exposed coast (Mattapoissett, Marion, Wareham) during the spring and summer months, and, during the winter, came inland to what is now Rochester, seeking protection from coastal storms. Expanding European settlement from the Marshfield, Plymouth, and Scituate areas during the Colonial period (1675-1775) displaced the native population. Rochester's first European settlement node developed in the 1680s at the junction of Perry Hill (currently New Bedford Road), Rounseville, and Marion Roads. Rochester's Common was established in 1697, with the first meetinghouse built shortly thereafter and the First Church of Rochester established in 1703.

The town center was solidified in the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the development of local highways. The settlement pattern at that time concentrated in or near the town center. Dispersed farming continued along all major roads in the town. Sawmills developed near the rivers that supplied lumber to coastal shipbuilding centers.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the secession of what is now Mattapoissett and Marion removed Rochester's two largest villages – which were also the town's two main business centers. The town's principal

product remained lumber. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rising popularity of cranberry growing added a needed supplement to Rochester's agricultural economy.

The northwestern part of town developed during this period. Residential development overall continued to concentrate around the town center, however. A particular style of cottage – a small, square, gable-roofed center-chimney cottage of one-room depth-developed at this time. Several examples still remain on Snipatuit Road.

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the automobile brought greater travel freedom, paved roads, and additional residential development along existing roads. The Hartley Mill became the town's largest industry and the growing cranberry industry saw the consolidation of family-owned bogs into large companies. Residential development during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century included Craftsman, Colonial Revival, and Dutch Colonial Revival style cottages clustered in the western half of town.

During the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rochester experienced its largest development. Between 1945 and 1979, the town more than doubled its population. Over 400 buildings were constructed during the 1970s alone. The town's industrial base diminished to one mill, which closed in 1964, and several cranberry bog operations, which continue to the present time. Residential development has included multiple subdivisions, with pressure for suburban development in outlying areas, especially near Snipatuit and Mary's Ponds.

Despite the new construction that occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rochester retains much of its historic settlement pattern and historic homes and structures. These give the town integrity of setting, feeling, and association with its long and rich history.

In 1998, the Historic District Commission was appointed by the Rochester Board of Selectmen to oversee changes to the town center.

Some of the most appreciated characteristics of our town are its historic public and private buildings. Although it is not always recognized, features such as stone walls and agricultural fields are also historic, representing some of the first activities of settlers in the New World. In Massachusetts, towns are authorized to designate any town roads as a "scenic road." This allows for Planning Board review of the cutting or removal of trees or the alteration of stonewalls on the documented layout.

We should also consider protecting our native American and sawmill sites. One way of accomplishing this is to include consideration of impact on archeological and historic sites in the town's special permit, site plan review, and subdivision plan decision criteria. Another approach is to designate a building or site as a local landmark to be approved by Town Meeting, or to apply for listing in the state or national registers of historic places.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Rochester's goals for historic preservation are about the same as in the Master Plan of 2000:

1. Preserve its historic center and rural town character, as expressed through its buildings, settlement pattern, historic, native American artifacts, and sawmill sites, big trees, and stonewalls.
2. Safeguard the character of Rochester's town center.
3. Protect viewscales and scenic roads – also important components of the town's character.
4. Continue re-planting street trees lost to disease and caterpillar infestations.

such alternatives as local, state, or national landmark designation.

4. Explore funding possibilities for protection through regional, state, and federal sources.

### ***PLANNING BOARD:***

1. Recommend approaches to protect viewscales (farm fields, stone walls, tree-lined roads, open views to woodland) throughout town.
2. Include historic and archeological impact in local special permit, site plan review, and subdivision control criteria.

## IMPLEMENTING ACTION TASKS

The following implementing actions are appropriate:

### ***HISTORIC COMMISSION CHALLENGES:***

1. Cultivate an understanding of historic artifacts and their importance to our sense of "Place".
2. Research and publish accounts of historic artifacts such as stagecoach roads, early waterway projects, water-power mills and how they worked, etc.
3. Identify historic and archeological sites throughout town and take measures to protect them. Explore