

Chapter III

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL OVERVIEW

“Loudon is a community whose character was shaped, in a very large measure, by its past. Loudon’s history is the story of the women and men who lived, worked, and died in Loudon and make that character what it is. Smart growth must protect Loudon’s forebearers’ contributions.”

- Loudon 2001 Historical and Cultural Resources Subcommittee

INTRODUCTION

Town histories are an integral part of the character and ambiance of any small town. They remind us of how the small, self-sustaining community developed into the typical New Hampshire “bedroom” community of the 20th and 21st century dependent upon goods, services, and employment available in larger municipalities. A number of historic structures, cemeteries, and sites are located in Loudon and will be inventoried in this chapter.

Equally important are the cultural events that are held in Loudon. Not only do they serve to unite its residents to the community, they also bring the past back to life and enable people to appreciate the special, irreplaceable assets of yesteryear. Preservation of historical resources is a logical step in the process of retaining rural character in the face of development. As Loudon’s population will grow within the next 20 years, reasonable actions must be taken in the most expedited manner to protect the historical and cultural resources within the Town and to educate upcoming generations of the unique beauty and value of old buildings and mill sites. The restoration of the Mill Pond in the Village center is an immediate priority of the community.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

- To preserve the historical resources of Loudon, including stone walls, old buildings, landmarks, cemeteries, and cellar holes, and encourage their stewardship;
- To promote the collection and preservation of historical artifacts relative to the history of Loudon;
- To encourage cultural events and the participation of residents in such events within Town through workshops, guest presentations, Old Home Day, and the Historical Society; and
- To develop, maintain, and update the history of the Town of Loudon.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

The Historical Society in Loudon is unique from others because the Town itself sponsors the Society in Loudon’s Community Building. A small budget of between \$750-1000 per year supports activities, acquisitions, and archiving.

Table III-1

Should the Town appropriate money to be used for the protection and preservation of natural, cultural, and historic resources?

Money for conservation	Total	Percentage
Yes	345	44.0%
No	108	13.8%
No opinion	282	36.0%
No answer	49	6.3%
Grand Total	784	100.0%

Table III-2

Do you believe the Town should create an Historic District to preserve the character of the Village?

Create Historic District	Total	Percentage
Yes	372	47.4%
No	227	29.0%
No opinion	148	18.9%
No answer	37	4.7%
Grand Total	784	100.0%

The results of Table III-1 show that 44% of respondents favored the Town appropriating monies for the preservation of resources, including those of the cultural and historic nature. An inventory of historic resources would be necessary in order to gain additional Town support. Also, 47% favored the creation of an Historic District for the Village to preserve its quaint New England character and architecture.

BRIEF HISTORICAL PROFILE OF LOUDON

Before Europeans migrated north into the Merrimack Valley area, many Native American tribes lived in the region. The land now called Loudon was home to an Abenaki tribe, and the highest point in Loudon, Sabattus Heights, is named after an Abenaki Chief.

The Town of Loudon was incorporated on January 23, 1773. The Town was “set off” from Canterbury and “...established to be a distinct and separate parish by the name of Loudon...” by a Charter approved by the General Assembly, the Council, and the Governor on January 22, 1773.

The Town’s name is seen to have two sources. First, the word “Loudon” is a Scottish word meaning “low hills” or “low hilly country”. Loudon’s terrain is clearly marked by low hills that are punctuated by the North-South flowing Soucook River (Soucook means “wildcat place”). The second source of the Town’s name is John Campbell, the Fourth Earl of Loudon. He was one of the original grantors of Canterbury and the selection of the name “Loudon” is seen to honor him.

The Town encompasses some 29,696 acres. Originally, Loudon was shaped in a rough rectangle. Its current shape was achieved after two changes of land. The first occurred in 1784 when the residents of the southwest corner of Loudon were dissatisfied with the location of the Meeting House. A committee was established to “set off” that parcel of land to Concord or to Canterbury. Eventually, the parcel was annexed by Concord. The second change happened in 1853 when a parcel of land in the vicinity of Rocky Pond was annexed by Loudon from Canterbury creating Loudon’s current shape.

The Charter required a Town Meeting which was held on March 23, 1773, hosted by Abraham Bachelder in his home. The meeting was conducted under the provisions of a warrant from Nathan Bachelder. In 1781, the Annual Meeting was, for the first time, held in the Town Meeting House which was constructed in 1779. Significantly, in 1792, Loudon had the distinction of hearing “testimony” from Shaker Elders Ebenezer Cooley and Israel Chauncey, making Loudon the first place Shaker testimony was given in New Hampshire.

Loudon’s population grew steadily for the first two hundred years. In 1775, the population of Loudon was set at 349. By 1973, the Town’s population was estimated at over 2,000 residents. In 1999, the Town’s population was estimated at 4,635 persons living in 1,762 residences.

Loudon was an agricultural community until just after the end of the nineteenth century. Loudon citizens continue to be involved in traditional agricultural pursuits. Today, agriculture and related industries can still be found in Loudon. There are farms raising hay, corn, and other vegetables. Maple syrup and sugar production continues in season and there are some beef and lamb producers. The New Hampshire International Speedway (NHIS) has a large presence in Loudon and produces a large tourist trade.

However, many residents now work in communities outside the Town, therefore making Loudon something of a “bedroom” community with Concord being the largest destination for commuters.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

This brief listing is only the beginning of a detailed inventory the Historical Society hopes to accomplish to thoroughly document the history of the Town of Loudon. Cultural events and resources, not always historical themselves, are equally important to document because they bind together the community in many ways.

National Register of Historic Places

Loudon has only one site on the National Register at this time. That site is the Loudon “Town Hall” described above as the Meeting House and was placed on the Register in 1990. A large effort is required on the part of individuals to promote places of historic importance through applications to the National Historic Register. No additional protection is afforded through the federal designation of a site to the National Register, but local recognition of the site’s importance is powerful tool against any potential development or changes to the site which are detrimental to the historical character.

There are several buildings or sites in Loudon which have the historic character that the Town desires to retain. These include the 1783 house (Lovejoy Farm), the “Town Hall”, Sanborn Farm, and several farms on Loudon Ridge.

Inventory of Historic Sites

These markers stand at places of great historical significance to the State of New Hampshire. Some of these places contain tangible reminders of the past, while others mark the locations of where structures once stood or a historical event took place.

One of the most well-known historical sites in New Hampshire is the Canterbury Shaker Village. While Loudon shares this historical site with Canterbury, the actual marker is located off of Route 106 at the terminus of Shaker Road in Loudon. The Shakers built the attractive utopian Canterbury Shaker Village in 1792 based upon their high moral standards. The Shakers became renowned for their craftsmanship, agricultural efficiency, and domestic skill. Shaker Village was listed on the National Register in 1975 under the Town of Canterbury.

Local markers, or the actual remnants of the structures themselves, indicate the sites of various historic landmarks.

- The Loudon Town Hall was erected in 1779 and served as the first church for the Town as well. In 1782, New Hampshire’s first Shaker sermon was given in this building.
- The Sanborn Farm, owned and operated by the same family for over two centuries, has recently been acquired by the Cabot Family. They are undertaking extensive restoration efforts involving the dam at the outlet of Sanborn Pond, the grist mill, the blacksmith shop, the ice house, and the saw mill. This will return many of the functions of this self-sufficient farm to the operational capabilities which it once possessed 160 years ago. The water-powered sawmill remained in operation until 1990.
- Five stone houses made from cut Loudon stone were built in 1830, and four of them still stand today. One of them is now owned by the Town of Loudon and houses the municipal offices.
- An old Native American trail used to travel along the Soucook River in Loudon and up into Gilmanton. This trail once connected the Concord area with Alton and Lake Winnepesaukee.
- At least a dozen small district schools existed in Loudon in the 19th century.
- Old tanning pits used in processing leather goods in the late 1700’s can still be found off of Pleasant Street.
- Various old mill sites dot Loudon’s countryside. These mills played a major part in the Town’s early development. Some remains of these structures can be seen along the Soucook River.

- The Loudon Community Building resulted from the renovation of a mid-19th century barn in 1999. It is located directly behind the municipal office building and was part of the same property, the Charles Symonds' farm. The structure is typical of many barns erected in New Hampshire during that time period. The renovation provided a kitchen, handicapped accessible restroom facilities, the Loudon Historical Society Museum, and a meeting room which seats about 100 people. The Loudon Community Building is used for regular meetings of all the Town Boards and a wide variety of other Town-oriented functions.
- An historic marker in the form of a slab of stone marks the location of Sabattus Heights off of Ridge Road, which is the highest location in Loudon.
- The State Champion Butternut Tree is located off Page Road.

Inventory of Cemeteries

Like many other small Central Region towns, Loudon has a rich heritage and a strong connection to its past. Cemeteries, both Town and small, private family plots, are an important and personal link. The four currently active cemeteries in Loudon are owned and operated by nonprofit Cemetery Associations.

Table III-3
Public and Private Cemeteries

	Owner	Map Number/Lot Number, Location
Moore Cemetery (active)	Union Cem Assn	29/84, Church Street
Mount Hope Cemetery (active)	Union Cem Assn	29/84, Church Street
Loudon Center Cemetery (active)	Loudon Ctr Cem Assn	33/9, Clough Hill Road
Loudon Ridge Cemetery	Loudon Ridge Cem Assn	63/21, Ridge Road
Loudon Mills Cemetery	Town of Loudon	20/30, Route 129
Maxfield Cemetery	Town of Loudon	56/7, William Maxfield Drive
Abbot Cemetery	State of New Hampshire	56/4, William Maxfield Drive
Blake Cemetery	Private	36/14, Blake Road
Cate Cemetery	Private	51/40, Lower Ridge Road
Lovering Cemetery	Private	49/106, Clough Pond Road
Moore/Sleeper Cemetery	Private	45/5, Ridge Road
Ladd Cemetery	Private	26/10, Route 129
Merrill Cemetery	Private	27/1, Route 129
Lougee Cemetery	Private	50/59, Mudgett Hill Road
Hill Cemetery	Private	50/8, Route 106 North
Winslow Cemetery	Private	4/11, Bear Hill Road
Hilliard Cemetery	Private	24/12, Pleasant Street Extension
French Cemetery	Private	36/3, Ridge Road
Smith-Sargent Cemetery	Private	59/7, Voted Road (west end)
Pearl Cemetery	Private	59/14, Voted Road (east end)
Old family cemetery (Sleeper)	Private	51/16, Lower Ridge Road
Old family cemetery (Blaisdell)	Private	60/54, Mudgett Hill Road
Old family cemetery (Cate)	Private	60/17, Storrs Drive
Old family cemetery (Whittemore)	Private	58/5, Shaker Road
Old family cemetery (Hill)	Private	50/4, Loudon Country Club #1 Fairway

Source: RP Ordway Trustee, Union Cemetery Association

Care and maintenance of the cemeteries is primarily funded from the sale of lots and from interest on trust funds established for perpetual care of the lots, some of which are held and managed by the Town and some by the appropriate Association. The Town budgets an amount, typically \$2,500, for care of the cemeteries it owns and for distribution to the Associations for care of lots which are abandoned or for which no trust funds has been established. For about the last 50 years, a trust fund has been included in the purchase price of a lot. However, since the Loudon Center Cemetery dates back to the mid-1700’s and the Moore and Mount Hope to the mid-1800’s, a fair number of lots exist without the benefit of a trust fund.

At the present time, land is not required for additional cemetery space. There appears to be enough room for expansion in the Moore, Loudon Center, and Loudon Ridge cemeteries for the next few generations of Loudon residents. More detailed information on Town-owned cemeteries can be found in the Community Facilities Chapter (CHAPTER VIII).

Inventory of Historic Mill Sites

The Soucook River afforded early settlers with the ability to create a thriving community based upon this outstanding natural resource. Water-powered mills provided economic opportunities which led Loudon into the Industrial Age of the 1800’s.

Table III-4
Historic Mill Site Remnants

Location	Map/Lot Number
Old Shaker Road, just South of Shaker Road	58/99
North of the corner of Clough Pond Road near Route 106	49/117
Kenney Road	53/1
Outlet of Sanborn Pond on Sanborn Road	17/1
Outlet of a wetland between Bear Hill and Bee Hole Roads	22/11

Source: Subcommittee Input

As of the writing of this Chapter, it is expected that there are several other historic mill sites in Loudon but their exact locations are unknown. The Soucook River Reclamation Plan, a document currently under production by the NH Department of Environmental Services and a private consultant, should contain a detailed listing of the historic mill sites in Loudon when the document becomes available to the public.

The *Historic and Cultural Features Map* depicts the known cemeteries, old school district sites, historic mill sites, and other historical markers noted in this Chapter.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN LOUDON

All small, rural communities have the opportunity to embrace their past and get to know their neighbors. There are many opportunities within Loudon which allow residents to socialize and learn about the history of their Town. The stronger the ties to local friends, neighbors, and the Town, the more likely people will be to settle permanent roots in Town. Today, gathering places and organized events foster relationships that imitate the dependency on one another that was critical to survival 200 years ago.

Historical Society

In the year 2000, the Historical Society hosted a State Barn Survey presentation by the State Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Foods. Society members distributed the Survey to town residents with historic barns, and one property owner received a grant to evaluate his barn at Route 129 and Pittsfield Road. The Society also hosts Social Events around the holidays to spread the cheer.

The Historical Society's artifact exhibit was recently reorganized into five distinct time periods: from 1773 to 1840; 1840 to 1865; 1865 to 1918; 1918 to 1945; and from 1945 to present. The array followed general themes of architectural change, maps and charts, and road and area changes. Visitors to the exhibit from Old Home Day found the reorganization to easy to follow.

As the occasion makes itself available, the Historical Society purchases or is given artifacts and memorabilia. Acquisitions within 2000 include a serial numbered sterling bicentennial coin, a labeled milk jug from the farm of Amos Currier (1845-1927), historical photographs of Loudon citizens, old group meeting records and pamphlets, and an 1858 Loudon Academy broadside.

Old Home Day

Old Home Day is an annual activity organized by the Old Home Day Association. This very popular event is held in August and attracts the young and elderly alike to booths, gatherings in the Village, and to the Historical Society. A photograph of the 1998 Old Home Day event is featured on the cover of the Population Chapter. Activities at Old Home Day include booths set up by Town Boards, tractor pulls, horseshoe tournaments, suppers, parades, citizen recognition events, storytelling, and fireworks. In 1998, the Old Home Day celebration was truly one for the record books, commemorating 225 years of incorporation beginning in 1773.

Young at Heart

The Young at Heart Senior Group holds monthly meetings at the Loudon Community Building and membership grows with each gathering. They hold workshops, sponsor trips, and provide support and socialization opportunities for Loudon residents aged 55 and older.

Recreational Fields

The recreational fields, both at the Elementary School and off of Village Road, serve as meeting grounds for students, parents, and teachers alike for sporting events and outdoor Town functions. New baseball diamonds were constructed on town-owned land on Staniels Road during 1999 and 2000. These should be ready for use by 2001. All recreational fields encourage the socialization of residents and further work to cement the bonds of the townspeople.

Loudon Elementary School

The original structure was built in 1860 and was one of thirteen one-room schoolhouses erected in the late 1800's and scattered uniformly about the Town in order to be accessible to all students within a reasonable walking distance. It was called the Village School, serving the children of the Loudon Village section of town, and the only schoolhouse constructed of bricks and mortar. It was occupied by Grades 1-8, as were the others in Town. Of the wood frame structures, five remain standing; four have been converted to residences, one of which has been relocated from its original location, and the fifth has been converted to the Loudon Ridge Fire Station.

An addition was made to the Village School in 1954, and again in 1977 when Loudon joined the Merrimack Valley Cooperative District. At this time it became the Loudon Elementary School. It was further expanded in 1988 and another expansion that started in 2000 is currently underway. Approximately 400 students from the Town of Loudon are presently enrolled in Grades K-5.

Veterans Organizations

Loudon has both an American Legion Post (#88) and a Veterans of Foreign Wars Post (#4405). At the present time the Legion Post, located at 55 South Village Road, has about 60 members and the VFW Post, located at 945 Route 106 North, has about 30 members. The Legion Post occupies one of Loudon's older structures. Dating to the first half of the 1800's, it has been a church, a school (or academy), and, prior to the Legion, a Grange Hall.

SUMMARY

The addition of a Historical and Cultural Overview Chapter improves the Master Plan's perspective by developing a humanistic aspect of Loudon and its history. It provides insight into the people who turned Loudon into the community it is today by describing a brief history of the Town, and by inventorying historic and cultural assets of Loudon.

The Historical Society, a valuable resource to the community, resides in the Loudon Community Building, affectionately called "Charlie's Barn". The Society houses many artifacts in organized exhibits which give a pictorial vision of Loudon's colorful past. Within the Chapter, inventories of cemeteries and historic mill sites are references for others to use to learn about the history of Loudon. Twenty-five known cemeteries are documented as well as five historic mill site locations. Other such inventories of known historic resources should be undertaken, including old cellar holes, schoolhouses, and other remnants of the past. Cemeteries, mill sites, the town pound, historical markers, and one National Register of Historic Places site are located on the *Historic and Cultural Features Map* of this 2001 Master Plan.

There are, however many additional tasks to be accomplished if the recognition of Loudon's historical and cultural heritage is to become a reality. Perhaps the most important task to accomplish this end would be the writing of a Town History of Loudon. In addition, public awareness of history through cultural activities will continue to provide today's basis for future histories written in the annals of Loudon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective

To preserve the historical resources of Loudon, including stone walls, old buildings, landmarks, cemeteries, and cellar holes and to encourage their stewardship.

- ◆ Undertake a thorough inventory of scenic, abandoned, and discontinued roads within Town and research where old rangeways once fell.
- ◆ Pursue the designation of an Historic District in the downtown Village to encourage a permanent sense of historical community preservation.
- ◆ Nominate sites or buildings of particular historic importance to the Town for the National Register of Historic Places.
- ◆ Consider the amendment of the Land Development Regulations to preserve the historic stonewalls in Town when developments threaten their locations in conjunction with the designation of selected scenic roads at Town Meeting.

Objective

To promote the collection and preservation of historical artifacts relative to the history of Loudon.

- ◆ Research and create a thorough inventory of the historic and cultural resources and artifacts in Loudon.

Objective

To encourage cultural events and the participation of residents in such events within Town through workshops, guest presentations, Old Home Day, and the Historical Society.

- ◆ Partner with the Library, Young at Heart Seniors Group, Schools, Old Home Day Association, and the Loudon Historical Society to produce and promote workshops or tours of historical buildings and sites.

Objective

To develop, maintain, and update the history of the Town of Loudon.

- ◆ Write a detailed Town History of Loudon from the first settlement to present day.