

Medfield's Historic & Cultural Resources - 3

A CENTURIES-LONG HUMAN HISTORY BEGUN BY NEPONSETS AND CONTINUED BY EUROPEAN PIONEERS

- Humans have inhabited the Medfield area for at least 8,500 years**, beginning with Native peoples who fished in the Charles, hunted in the marshlands, and established trails running east and west across the river. Several area place names originating from these early inhabitants, such as "Metacomet," are still in use today.
- The first Europeans to settle in Medfield migrated to the area from Dedham and Dorchester in 1649** and laid out a village center along Vine Brook. Medfield was set off from Dedham in 1650 and in 1651 became its own town. By 1657, forty families had settled and set up farms, but nearly all was lost in 1676 when King Philip (Metacomet) attacked and burned much of the village. Vine Lake Cemetery, established in 1651, and the Dwight-Derby House (built in ca. 1651) are some of the only remaining historic resources from this early settlement period.
- Farming and grazing dominated the early Medfield economy** and continued to do so into the early 1800s. Manufacturing began around 1800, first with small cottage industries producing strawbraided hats and bonnets, boots, shoes and brushes. As the 19th century wore on, larger industries emerged, producing pitchforks and carriages. Hat production continued, largely through the operations of the Excelsior Straw Works, and did not end until the 1950s. The Medfield State Hospital, opened in 1896, bolstered the local economy well into the 20th century. After World War II and the improvement of transportation routes into and around Boston, Medfield developed into a commuter suburb.
- Beginning in the 1700s, Medfield attracted and inspired artists, writers and musicians.** The first known published writer from Medfield was Hannah Adams, who wrote *A view of Religious Opinions* in 1784. Later the Town was home to painters George Inness and Dennis Miller Bunker, as well as musician James Carroll Bartlett and music educators William Tilden and Charles Martin Loeffler. This tradition continues today through the efforts of the Cultural Alliance of Medfield and others to transform the former Medfield State Hospital campus into a cultural center.
- The Town's extant historic resources**, including houses, barns, mills, civic and religious structures, **tell the story of Medfield's development** from a small rural farming community to modern 21st century suburb.



The Peak House, dating to 1711, is one of the oldest extant structures in Medfield.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- By updating the 1999 **Preservation Plan**, Medfield can align its future preservation goals with those of the 2020 Townwide Master Plan.
- By updating the **Inventory of Historic Resources** and making it publicly available through the Town website, Medfield will help make its preservation goals clearer to property owners.
- By creating the **East Main Street Local Historic District**, Medfield will help protect the east end of Main Street from Downtown to the Westwood line, including the Clark Tavern and Peak House.
- By adopting the **Community Preservation Act**, Medfield will establish a source of financial support for future preservation efforts
- By becoming a **Certified Local Government**, Medfield will become eligible for additional preservation-related funding.
- By redeveloping the **Medfield State Hospital** into a regional arts and cultural center, Medfield will help ensure that its centuries-long tradition of supporting and nurturing artists will continue.

A TRADITION OF RECOGNIZING, PRESERVING, AND INTERPRETING HISTORIC RESOURCES

- Through the efforts of Medfield’s Historical Commission and Historic Districts Commission, **the Town has protected a significant number of its historic buildings** from demolition or alteration. This has been accomplished by maintaining the inventory of historic resources, establishing four Local Historic Districts, listing six individual properties on the National Register of Historic Places, and adopting of an 18-month Demolition Delay Bylaw. A fifth Local Historic District, extending eastward along Route 109 from Downtown, would protect 38 additional properties, including the George Inness studio, Peak House, and ca. 1740 Clark Tavern.
- **Medfield maintains several historic buildings as interpretive sites**, including the Kingsbury Pond Grist Mill, Dwight-Derby House, Peak House, and Lowell Mason House. Volunteers manage most of the programs and preservation efforts associated with these.
- **Medfield Historical Society**, established in 1891, is one of the oldest collecting organizations of its kind in Massachusetts, maintaining documents and artifacts dating to the time of the town’s settlement in 1649. Together with the adjacent **Medfield Public Library**, the society serves as a cultural and historical hub.
- **Medfield’s oldest known place of interment, Vine Lake Cemetery**, holds burials from the 1600s through the present day, documenting the full history of the town. The non-profit **Vine Lake Cemetery Preservation Trust** oversees stewardship of the cemetery and provides interpretive information for visitors.



The Kingsbury Grist Mill, located at the southern end of Kingsbury Pond, dates to 1702. Its stewardship is overseen by a volunteer committee.

AN ONGOING COMMITMENT TO THE ARTS

- **The 2017 Arts and Economic Prosperity Study** of determined that \$3.1 million is generated annually by non-profit arts organizations and event-related spending in Medfield.
- **The Cultural Alliance of Medfield and Zullo Gallery Center for the Arts** form the bedrock of arts activity in the Town. In addition to maintaining a comprehensive website listing all historic, cultural, recreation, and nature-related happenings in Medfield, CAM is spearheading the effort to rehabilitate the former Medfield State Hospital into an arts center.
- **The Medfield Foundation, Inc. and Medfield Cultural Council** both provide financial support for the arts in Medfield. The foundation supports an Art in Public Places program and financed the construction of Straw Hat Park. The Cultural Council has funded visual and performing artists to showcase their work and to bring art into the schools.



Straw Hat Park, located off North Street, provides an intimate place for pedestrians to pause, while traveling through Downtown.