



Received 11/4/03
BT

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Massachusetts Historical Commission

October 29, 2003

Ms. Carol Shull
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
1201 Eye Street, NW, 8th floor
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the following nomination form:

Commonwealth Avenue HD, North Attleborough (Bristol), MA

The nomination has been voted eligible by the State Review Board and has been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. The owners of the properties included in the district were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 30 to 45 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment.

One letter of objection has been received.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Betsy Friedberg".

Betsy Friedberg
National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission

enclosure

cc: Wm. McKenzie Woodward, Consultant
John C. Rhyno, Board of Selectmen
Donald Johnson, Planning Board
Robert Ashton, North Attleborough Historical Commission
Doris Neal, North Attleborough Historical Commission

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Commonwealth Avenue HD

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Commonwealth Ave., north side from Stanley St. to beyond Robinson St. n/a not for publication

city or town North Attleborough n/a vicinity

state Massachusetts code MA county Bristol code 005 zip code 02763

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Petey Friedberg, National Register Director
Signature of certifying official/Title Cara H. Metz, State Historic Preservation Officer
Massachusetts Historical Commission

10/27/03
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Commonwealth Ave. HD
Name of Property

Bristol, MA
County and State

Classification

Ownership of Property

Check as many boxes as apply)

(Check only one box)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>13</u>	<u>2</u>	building
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>13</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling
INDUSTRY/manufacturing
GOVERNMENT/post office
COMMERCE/specialty store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single, multiple dwellings
INDUSTRY/manufacturing
COMMERCE/specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal
MID 19th CENTURY: Greek Revival
LATE VICTORIAN: Queen Anne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____
walls _____
roof _____
other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Commonwealth Ave. HD

Name of Property

Bristol, MA

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
- Community Planning and Development
- Industry
- Social History

Period of Significance

Ca. 1800-1953

Significant Dates

N/a

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

E. R. Wheeler (Providence, RI)
Frank E. Field

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Commonwealth Ave. HD
Name of Property

Bristol, MA
County, State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 12.5 acres

UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1. 19	308400	4648940	3. 19	308780	4648720
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
2. 19	308800	4648840	4. 19	308380	4648600
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title William McKenzie Woodward, consultant, with Betsy Friedberg, NR Director, MHC

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date October 2003

street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone 617-727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name multiple

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

Commonwealth Avenue HD
N. Attleborough (Bristol), MA

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7. Description

Located on a flat plain approximately 150 feet above sea level and less than a quarter mile north of the Ten Mile River, Commonwealth Avenue, approximately a mile and a third in length, extends east-west from Mount Hope Street on the west across I-95 to North Main Street (MA Route 152) in North Attleborough. Approximately halfway between the street's two termini, the Commonwealth Avenue Historic District is a linear district approximately three-eighths of a mile long on the north side of a broad, tree-lined, double-lane thoroughfare. The generally large-scale houses that line the street are set well back from the street and surrounded by ample lawns, while the jewelry-manufacturing plant at the district's east end is set close to the lot line on the street edge.

INVENTORY

The inventory includes all buildings and other resources, both contributing and non-contributing, located within the district.

Unless otherwise noted in individual entries, all residential properties are wood-frame construction with brick foundations and asphalt-covered flank-gable roofs, and all garages are single story-high wood-frame construction with asphalt covered end-gable roofs.

COMMONWEALTH AVENUE

- 140 V.H. Blackinton Factory (1869 *et seq.*): A 2½-story wood-frame building with a 15-bay-façade rectangular-plan main block with a center entrance set within an end-gable-roof porch and two low, 1-story, flat-roof additions, one rectangular in plan and extending east along Commonwealth Avenue and one L-shape in plan and extending north from the north wall thence east, forming a small courtyard at rear. A small belfry is centered on the gable roof. Walls are covered with asbestos shingles on top of original clapboard. Virgil H. Blackinton began the production of jet jewelry here in 1857 in an old schoolhouse. During the Civil War he manufactured military insignia and book clasps. After the building burned in 1869, he built the 2½-story core of this complex on the same site. Blackinton continued to manufacture here throughout the 19th century and into the early 1980s, when the company moved to an industrial park, where it remains in business today. Since Blackinton's departure, the complex has

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N. Attleborough (Bristol), MA

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seen a variety of multiple commercial and industrial uses, beginning in 1984 with a convenience store, a kung-fu judo school, a tanning and exercise salon, and an engraving company. Blackington lived nearby in a house at 180 Commonwealth Avenue, replaced by the Semple House in the 1920s.

160 Cumberland Farms (ca. 1980): A single story brick-and-concrete-block building, corner plate-glass display windows, and a flat roof skirted by a plastic "shingle" mansard roof. Set well back from the street on a macadam parking terrace with two gasoline pumps in front, this is a typical late- 20th century franchise convenience store. (NC)

161 Robinson House (ca. 1830): An impressive and unusual Late Federal/Greek Revival house with extensive ells to the south and southwest of the main block. Local tradition maintains that the house was built in 1806 by Colonel Obed Robinson, founding manufacturer of the nation's first button works, located just south of this house and no longer extant. Its form strongly recalls two relatively nearby and well-known Federal houses in Rhode Island: John Holden Greene's Sullivan Dorr House (1809), 109 Benefit Street, Providence, and Russell Warren's Bosworth-Wardwell House (1815), 515 Hope Street, Bristol, both of which featured a 5-bay facade on their lower stories with a 3-bay top story. If the date is as early as 1806, the house must have been extensively remodeled sometime between 1820 and 1840. The strong integration of decorative elements--pilaster strips, cornice--with the overall form, however, favors a later date over the extensive-remodeling theory. At any rate, this house deserves further investigation and research. It was converted to use as a mortuary in 1963.

172 House (ca. 1800): A vinyl-sided 2½-story, 5-bay-façade, center-chimney house with center entrance set within a 1-story early 20th-century pedimented porch and picture windows flanking the front door; 1-story wings extend to the east and west. In the early part of the 19th century, this was a stagecoach stop that also housed a post office. In the late 19th century the Freeman Co. owned the property, probably for residence by its workers. By the mid-1920s it was the home of the Reverend Ebor Eldon Craig, pastor of the nearby Central Congregational Church, and his wife, Audie B. Craig. By the early 1950s, it had been divided into at least five apartments.

180 Joseph and Edna Semple House (ca. 1924): A shingled 2½-story, 3-bay-façade, Dutch Colonial house with stucco foundation, tripartite windows flanking a center entrance with sidelights set within a pedimented 1-story, Tuscan-column porch whose roof

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intersects with the lowest slope of the flared 2-story gambrel roof, and paired windows on the second story. This was first the home of a jeweler and his wife.

188 Robinson-Simmons House (ca. 1825, 1881-82): A south-facing 2½-story, 5-bay-façade house set on a low stone foundation with a projecting center tower capped by spire and elaborate lightening rod, prominent strut work brackets at the cornice, and a large addition to the northeast. A full-width turned-spindle porch once stretched across the façade. It stands well back from the street atop a low terrace defined with granite coping walls at sidewalk's edge. Richard Robinson, a manufacturer of glass buttons and elder brother and business partner of Willard Robinson, built this house and lived here until his death in the 1850s. Francis Robinson then lived here, and Robert F. Simmons, manufacturing jeweler purchased the property from his estate in March 1881. In January 1882, *The Attleboro Chronicle* reported that "A.R. Chace of North Attleboro has remodeled the Robinson estate house for R.F. Simmons..." Simmons moved his rolled-plate-chain factory from the Falls to the Freeman building on nearby Robinson Street in 1875 (q.v.); he lived here until the late 1890s. It remained a single-family house occupied by professionals well into the 20th century. Remodeling simple, rectangular-plan 18th- and early 19th-century houses was not unusual in the late 19th century (*Cf* 390 Mount Hope Street). An early 20th century garage is located at the rear.

204 Samuel D. Mason House (1881-82): E.R. Wheeler (Providence), builder. A fine and little-altered 2½-story, T-plan, cross-gable-roof Modern Gothic house with paired windows, handsome and elaborate strut work front porch, 1-story semi-octagonal-plan bay windows with end-gable roofs carried on brackets on each of the end-gable walls, elaborate bracketed cornices and pierced-work bargeboards, and a prominent square-plan center tower with hip roof and elaborate lightening rod. A mid-20th-century garage stands at rear. Mason was a partner in Mason, Draper & Co., manufacturers of rolled-stock-plate jewelry from 1870 until the early 1890s, when the business dissolved, and he formed Mason Jewelry Co. From the mid-1920s until the early 1950s this was the home of plumber Henry J. Pontbriand and his wife, Pauline. This is a textbook example of Modern Gothic of the late 1870s and early 1880s.

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- 212 Edwin L. Evans House (ca. 1890; Frank E. Field, architect): A 2½-story irregularly massed Queen Anne house with high hip roof, semi-elliptical-plan corner entrance porch, and semi-octagonal projecting pavilion capped by a squat needle spire on the southwest corner. A mid-20th-century garage stands at rear. Edwin L. Evans, a manufacturer of gilt buttons, lived here with his family. Jewelry manufacturer Alfred L. Lindroth and his wife, Helen, lived here from the mid-1920s until the early 1950s; he was the owner of A.L. Lindroth, located at 82 Elm Street while he lived here, but located in the 1950s and 1960s at 35 Robinson Street (*q.v.*).
- 234 Frank M. Sturdy House (ca. 1885): A compactly massed T-plan 2½-story cross-gable-roof Queen Anne house with latticework-and-turned-post porch that extends from within the massing of the house at the front entrance and wraps around the exterior beyond the mass of the house on the east side, staggered-butt shingles on the flaring second story, and a second-story porch above the entrance set within a round-arch opening. Son of John F. Sturdy (see 110 Towne Street), Frank M. Sturdy (1857-1909) worked for the family jewelry-manufacturing company, J.F. Sturdy's Sons. This house is identical to one built for Joseph G. Birch, a Providence purveyor of men's furnishings, at 49 Princeton Avenue in the Elmwood section of Providence. Sturdy acquired his lot in November 1884, four months before Birch acquired his Providence lot in March 1885. The design source for both remains unknown.

ROBINSON STREET

- 35 Freeman-Sturdy Factory (ca. 1858 et seq.): A wood-frame, 2 1/2-story, 13-bay-facade mill with mansard roof and off-center projecting stair tower is the frontispiece of a rambling industrial complex, built principally of wood. An attached 1-story brick powerhouse is located at the southwest corner of the complex. It appears to date largely from the second half of the 19th century: the mansard-roof section along Robinson Street, the ell extending west on the mansard-roof section's north side, and the powerhouse were all in place by 1895. Additions directly west and south of the mansard-roof section date from the first half of the 20th century. This building housed jewelry manufacturing for more than a hundred years. Its first occupant was a firm established by brothers Benjamin S. and Joseph J. Freeman in 1847 as Freeman & Br^o. The company moved to this plant in 1858, and changed its name to Freeman & C^o two years later. Following Joseph Freeman's death in 1879, the company became B.S. Freeman & C^o; B.S. Freeman, J^r, entered the firm in 1882. The company, which specialized in the manufacture of rolled plate goods, principally chains and

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bracelets, remained in operation here until 1913; after that, Freeman merged his operations with W.F. Barden and H.E Hull, and Freeman, Barden and Hull manufactured jewelry here from the mid-1910s to the early 1920s. From 1924 through 1955, J.F. Sturdy's Sons manufactured jewelry here; the company was the successor to J.F. Sturdy & C^o, founded in the late 1840s, which introduced the manufacture of rolled gold plated stock and jewelry into the town of Attleborough. A.L. Lindroth continued that use of the plant from 1956 through 1962; Lindroth himself lived around the corner at 212 Commonwealth Avenue (*q.v.*) from the 1920s until the early 1950s. Since 1963, the building has housed a variety of mixed industrial uses; in that year American Mesh Wire C^o, B & J Jewelry C^o, and Standard Atomizer C^o were located here. Portions of the building are vacant today.

STANLEY STREET

- 15 Frank M. Sturdy Barn and Carriage House (ca. 1885): A 2½-story end-gable-roof building with staggered-butt shingles on the upper part of the 1st story and in the attic gable ends. While fenestration has been reworked and additions constructed on the east and north—respectively with shed and end-gable roofs—the building still reads as the outbuilding for the Sturdy House at 234 Commonwealth Avenue (*q.v.*).

Archaeological Description

While no ancient Native American sites are recorded in the district, it is possible that sites are present. Seven sites have been recorded in the general area (within one mile). Environmental characteristics of the district represent several locational criteria (slope, soil drainage, proximity to wetlands) that are favorable for the presence of Native American sites. The district includes a flat plain containing well-drained soils formed in glacial till. The entire district is located within 1,000 feet of the Ten Mile River and Ten Mile River Pond. The confluence of the Ten Mile and Bungay Rivers lies approximately one mile southeast of the district. The Ten Mile River forms part of the Narragansett Bay drainage eventually reaching the estuarine zone to the south in Seekonk, Massachusetts. Downstream from the district, the Ten Mile River drainage is a documented locus of Native American settlement along the Ten Mile, Bungay, and Seven Mile Rivers. At least 34 sites are known in the short distance between Attleborough Falls and Attleborough Center within one to two miles southeast of the district. Given the above information, the size of the district (12.5 acres), and the availability of open land in the district, a moderate potential exists for the recovery of ancient Native American resources.

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A high potential exists for locating historic archaeological resources in the Commonwealth Avenue Historic District. Historic settlement in the district locale began in the early 18th century; however, documented settlement in the district did not occur until ca.1800 when the house at 172 Commonwealth Avenue was built. The district remained sparsely settled through the first third of the 19th century with only four houses in the area, three of which were in the district at 161, 172, and 188 Commonwealth Avenue. Each of these houses is extant in the district today. Structural evidence of two later 19th century houses, demolished for late 20th century development, may exist in the district, including the M. B. Macreth House at the east corner of Robinson and Commonwealth Avenue, and the J. J. Freeman House between Freeman Street and James Swanzey Road. Structural evidence of barns and outbuildings may also exist with archaeological sites and extant buildings. Structural evidence may also exist from the 19th century schoolhouse used by Vergil H. Blackinton as a jewelry factory from 1867 until it burned in 1869. Archaeological evidence of occupational related features (trash pits, privies, wells) may survive with existing buildings and archaeological sites, especially for earlier 19th century buildings.

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8. Significance

The Commonwealth Avenue Historic District, North Attleborough, Massachusetts, meets criteria A and C on the local level for its associations with residential and industrial development in North Attleborough in the late industrial period and for its well-preserved examples of late 19th- and early 20th-century residential and industrial architecture. The district achieves significance in the areas of industry, social history, community planning and development, and architecture. Under criterion A and in the area of industry, the presence of the B.S. Freeman and V.H. Blackinton factories tells a part of the story of the importance and persistence of jewelry manufacturing in Attleborough Falls. The juxtaposition of large, stylish houses with the Blackinton factory near the industrialized Ten Mile River reveals the living and working patterns of the individuals who populated this area, which still has the capacity to illustrate an aspect of social history that has largely disappeared. Under criterion C, the district, a location for large, stylish 19th-century houses, achieves significance as a touchstone to a slice of the history of domestic architecture.

HISTORY

TOWN OF NORTH ATTLEBOROUGH

Located 30 miles south of Boston in Bristol County, North Attleborough was part of the 1666 Rehoboth North Purchase. North Attleborough was part of the Town of Attleborough from its incorporation in 1694 until North Attleborough's incorporation as a separate township in 1887.

The tract granted in 1666 to the inhabitants of Rehoboth by the Plymouth Colony included parts of present-day Attleborough, Mansfield, and Norton, Massachusetts, and Cumberland, Rhode Island. The earliest English settlement in present-day North Attleborough was by John Woodcock on today's East Washington Street before 1670. When the Town of Attleborough was incorporated in 1694, its population counted 180. Ample water supply from Whitings Pond to the west and Ten Mile River to the east encouraged settlement of the area; saw and grist mills were among the area's earliest commercial and industrial activities. Early English settlement in the area that became North Attleborough focused at the villages of Old Town, North Village, and Attleborough Falls and remained primarily agricultural with subsistence milling until the middle of the 19th century. As early as the Federal Period, however, North Village and Attleborough Falls became increasingly industrialized along power privileges of the Ten Mile River.

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By the mid-19th century, North Attleborough began to bloom as a jewelry- and precious-metals-manufacturing center. By 1855, the northern portion of Attleborough had a population of nearly 3000 and supported twenty-four jewelry manufacturers. The Civil War magnified the area's precious-metals-manufacturing role with extensive commissions from the United States government for uniform buttons, braid, badges, and emblems. Old Town remained the community center until the development of the Town Center along North and South Washington Streets, beginning in the mid-19th century and accelerating after the advent of the railroad west from the main Boston-Providence line to South Washington Street in 1870. North Attleborough was incorporated in 1887 after separation from Attleborough itself. Until the mid-20th century, North Attleborough remained an internationally known center for jewelry manufacturing.

ATTLEBOROUGH FALLS

Attleborough Falls, the location of the Commonwealth Avenue Historic District, is the site of some of the Town of North Attleborough's most significant industrial development. It retains important industrial, domestic, and institutional buildings as well as a fine mid-19th century rural cemetery.

Development at The Falls by non-Native Americans began no later than the beginning of the 18th century. By 1703 John Daggett was operating a corn mill at The Falls, and a sawmill was probably located here as well. Neither the early mills nor any buildings or structures remain of the sparse 18th -century development that occurred around The Falls.

The present industrialization of the area dates to 1809, when Artemis Stanley sold the property located today at 426 Mount Hope Avenue to a group of investors (including himself) who built a factory on the water privilege. The mill burned in 1811 and was immediately rebuilt on the site; that wood-frame building remained on the site at least until the end of the 19th century. In 1831, the 125-acre reservoir, known today as Falls Pond, was created west of the falls, and a stone mill, sixty-eight by thirty-eight feet, was erected. The stone mill was expanded 1857 and later. The original stone mill for the Falls Manufacturing Company housed cotton production until after Civil War, when H. N. Daggett converted it to braid manufacturing.

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The Falls was the site of the first company in the United States formed for the manufacture of metal buttons. In 1812 Colonel Obed and Otis Robinson began manufacturing buttons in a building on the Ten Mile River at Robinson Street. This building is probably not extant.¹ The wooden mill complex at 35 Robinson Street housed the B. S. Freeman & Co. jewelry manufactory from 1847 until 1913, although exclusive use of the complex for jewelry continued into the 1960s.

In 1857, V. H. Blackinton purchased an old wooden schoolhouse on Commonwealth Avenue and began manufacturing jet jewelry. The complex was rebuilt--again in wood--following a fire in 1869. It expanded though the 19th century and continued production at 100 Commonwealth Avenue until late in the 20th century.

Paper-box manufacturing, an important ancillary to the jewelry industry so important regionally, began in North Attleborough in 1851. In 1891 J. F. and C. O. Mason began producing jewelry boxes in a small gable-roof building at the west end of their complex at 521 Mount Hope Avenue. The company expanded into a spreading two-story wood-frame building completed ca 1910. Production of paper boxes continues today in the same location, but much of the complex was covered in the mid-1990s with vertical-seam aluminum siding, and most of the fenestration has been replaced.

An impressive variety of domestic architecture complements the industrial complexes in The Falls. These houses and their outbuildings, in fact, are related to the industrial development here. The larger, more stylish houses were occupied by the mill owners and investors or their families; the smaller and often similar ones, by those who worked in the mills. For example jewelry manufacturer B. S. Freeman, whose plant stands at 35 Robinson Street, lived up the hill at 390 Mount Hope Avenue in an imposing house dominated by a four-story mansard-roof entrance tower and wraparound front porch. S. D. Mason, a relative of the box manufacturers, lived in a fine Modern Gothic house at 204 Commonwealth Avenue. V. H. Blackinton lived at 172 Commonwealth Ave., just a short walk from his factory at number 100. In the late 19th century, H. B. Davenport built a row of small almost-identical houses on the north side of (appropriately named) Cottage Street; these were likely occupied by workers at nearby B. S. Freeman & Co.

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¹ Robinson's factory or a portion thereof may be incorporated in the Freeman-Sturdy Factory at 35 Robinson Street, but a physical examination of that complex is needed to determine its evolution.

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The extant buildings and their relationships one to another have the capacity physically to illustrate the social history of the area. After H. N. Daggett purchased the old Falls Factory in 1861, the

...property had become somewhat run down; the tenements and their surroundings were so shabby and untidy, and some of the residents were so lawless that the community had come to have a rather disreputable name. As soon as he took possession, Mr. Daggett established order and had it maintained, and the "roughs" who had become a real terror, under his decided and vigorous treatment "either left town, or subsided into peaceful citizens." He has greatly improved the whole property, erected new buildings, and made for himself there a charming home.²

Daggett's large house on ample grounds at the intersection of Elm Street and Mount Hope Avenue has disappeared, but the mill itself and the tenements along the east side of Mount Hope Avenue between Elm Street and Commonwealth Avenue remain. John F. Sturdy, a gold-plate-jewelry manufacturer, occupied a rambling concave-mansard-roof dwelling at 110 Towne Street (see the Towne Street HD, pending); handsomely landscaped--and probably incorporating historic landscape features--his property recalls his interest "...in the improvement and beautifying of this pleasant little village ... by making an attractive home, for himself which he surrounded by well-kept grounds."³ Sturdy's house is immediately around the corner and across the Ten Mile River from Central Congregational Church, which benefited from his generous gifts, and he "...was one of the unusually efficient building committee when its edifice was erected."

By the late 1840s need was perceived for a new cemetery in Attleborough. Like many industrializing communities, the citizens of Attleborough wanted an isolated, carefully landscaped rural cemetery, a type of burial ground just coming into fashion. Set behind an Egyptian Revival brownstone gate, Mount Hope Cemetery, follows the picturesque precepts already realized in Cambridge's Mount Auburn Cemetery (1831) and Providence's Swan Point Cemetery (1847), both of which were surely known to the incorporators of Mount Hope. At its consecration on 2 June 1850, the Rev'd J. M. B. Bailey extolled the virtues of the rural cemetery as a transcendent place when he noted that the cemetery was:

(continued)

² John Daggett, *A Sketch of the History of Attleborough From Its Settlement to the Division* (Boston, 1894), p. 524.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 596.

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...so far removed from the stir and bustle of active life... [and its landscape] ...diversified with brook and pond and rushing stream, with plain and hillock, with gentle declivity and retiring vale, with sunshine and shade, with the natural forest and the cultivated grove. Let everything connected with, and belonging to, this most interesting place, its trees, its monuments, its grass, its foliage, its evergreens, point the visitor to the resurrection and the life to come.⁴

The Falls retains intact historic resources that achieve significance in the areas of industry, architecture, social history, and landscape architecture. The Falls Factory complex, Freeman-Sturdy Factory, and the V. H. Blackington factory are telling artifacts about textile and jewelry manufacturing. The clusters of houses along Freeman and Towne Streets and Commonwealth and Mount Hope Avenues and several individual isolated houses--such as the Stanley brothers' houses at 66 Stanley and 327 Towne Streets--are fine, representative examples of late 19th-century domestic architecture. The juxtapositions of industrial, residential, and institutional buildings tell of important community social interrelationships. Mount Hope Cemetery and the grounds of the John F. Sturdy House are good examples of historic landscape.

COMMONWEALTH AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Commonwealth Avenue, the most direct route between the town centers of Attleborough to the east and North Attleborough to the west,⁵ existed by the 18th century. A stage route traversed the street by the early years of the 19th century, when it was still a sparsely settled rural area; only three houses (161, 172, and 188 Commonwealth Avenue) document that era.⁶ Manufacturing at The Falls began in 1809, and in 1812 Colonel Obed and Otis Robinson began manufacturing buttons in a building on the Ten Mile River at Robinson Street. Whether this building still remains is unknown; it may incorporated into the extant wooden mill complex at 35 Robinson Street which housed the B.

(continued)

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 753.

⁵ The two municipalities were one until division in 1887.

⁶ As far as can be determined, these are the only houses built here in the early nineteenth century. A fourth house, approximately a quarter of a mile west of the district at the southeast corner of Commonwealth Avenue and Towne Street, was moved to 354 Mount Hope Street in 1967; it is included in the Attleborough Falls Historic District.

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S. Freeman & Co. jewelry manufactory from 1858 until 1913. Industrial activity intensified here in the mid-19th century, and its presence led to the creation of a village at The Falls. Mills were built on Robinson Street and Towne Street in the first half of the century, and V.H. Blackington began his jewelry operation at 140 Commonwealth Avenue in 1857. Both the manufacturers who owned or managed these mills as well as many of the workers who operated the machinery within them built and occupied housing in the area. By 1895, large houses stood on both sides of Commonwealth Avenue east of Robinson Street and west of the Fair Grounds, now occupied by a shopping center adjacent to Interstate Highway 95. A few other houses, similar in size and quality to the 19th-century houses, filled in the vacant lots among them in the early 20th century. Late 20th-century development claimed the two largest properties on the south side of the street, the M.B. Macreth House, at the east corner of Robinson Street and Commonwealth Avenue, and the J.J. Freeman House, which stood on a large lot opposite Stanley Street between Freeman Street and James Swanzezy Road. Both houses were demolished and replaced: McGrath by a concrete-block industrial building and Freeman by a two-story apartment building.

ARCHITECTURE

The Commonwealth Avenue Historic District achieves significance for architectural history in several ways. The houses built here reflect in the periods when The Falls's industrial activity was thriving. Their forms and styles are typical, stylish, 19th- and early 20th-century mainstream domestic architecture. They also illustrate architectural influence of nearby Providence, Rhode Island, with which the community shared cultural and business connections.

Industrial development at The Falls began in the early 19th century and peaked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The houses built here, most by jewelry manufacturers, date to those periods. The Federal house built at 188 Commonwealth Avenue by Richard Robinson (ca. 1825 and later remodeled) and the Late Federal/Greek Revival Robinson House (ca. 1830) at 161 Commonwealth Avenue reflect the area's first blush of industrial success. The Modern Gothic house that box-manufacturer Samuel D. Mason built at 204 Commonwealth Avenue in 1881-82 and the Queen Anne houses built by jewelry manufacturers Frank M. Sturdy (ca. 1885) at 234 Commonwealth Avenue and Edwin L. Evans (ca. 1890) at 212 Commonwealth Avenue are equally telling of later success. Rolled-plate-chain-manufacturer Robert F. Simmons chose, on the other hand, to remodel; he added a prominent tower, strut work brackets, turned-spindle front porch (since removed), and a large rear ell to Richard Robinson's house at 188 Commonwealth Avenue in January 1882. Houses are exceptionally telling barometers of both individual and community status, and these convey a strong sense of time and place individually and collectively.

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The Commonwealth Avenue houses reflect mainstream American architecture. The south-facing, center-chimney, 2½-story house with a five-bay-façade and center entrance is one of the most pervasive 18th- and early 19th-century Southern New England house types; the form is represented here by the house at 172 Commonwealth Avenue. The Colonel Obed Robinson House at 161 Commonwealth Avenue illustrates the continued emphasis on classicism and symmetry found in Late Federal and early Greek Revival forms, and its unusual massing shows an awakening interest in formal experimentation that reflects the growing sophistication of both builder and client that occurred in the early years of the 19th century. By the latter part of the 19th century, architectural designs reflected a broad range of references to historic styles, used either in coherent, consistent adaptations, like the Modern Gothic Mason House at 204 Commonwealth Avenue, or in more free-handed eclecticism, like the Sturdy House at 234 Commonwealth Avenue. The Dutch Colonial house that Joseph and Edna Semple built in 1924 at 180 Commonwealth Avenue reflects the early 20th-century interest in reviving and celebrating the early architecture of this country.

The influence of nearby Providence, one of the cradles of American jewelry manufacturing and the birthplace of plated jewelry, is seen in two houses within the district. In both its innovative use of classical forms and the stepped-back massing of its upper story, the Colonel Obed Robinson House at 161 Commonwealth Avenue strongly recalls John Holden Greene's Sullivan and Lydia Dorr House (1809), 109 Benefit Street, Providence.⁷ Frank M. Sturdy's house (234 Commonwealth Avenue) is identical to the house built about the same time for Joseph G. Birch at 49 Princeton Avenue in Providence's Elmwood section.⁸ The connection between Birch, a principal haberdasher in the Downtown Providence firm of Leavens & Birch, and jewelry manufacturer Sturdy remains unknown.

(continued)

⁷ The Dorr House probably also influenced the design by Russell Warren of the Bosworth-Wardwell House (1815), 515 Hope Street, Bristol. Warren's practice included several southeastern Massachusetts commissions, and his involvement with this house is not inconceivable.

⁸ Both houses resemble the work of the Providence architectural firm Gould & Angell, who also worked at the time in North Attleborough. (The nearby houses of Benjamin and Stephen Stanley [both ca 1883] were designed by Gould & Angell; a nomination for the Benjamin Stanley House is in the final stages of preparation.) Providence building permits are missing for the construction period of Birch's house.

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INDUSTRY

The two jewelry-manufacturing properties included in the Commonwealth Avenue Historic District, the Freeman-Sturdy Factory (ca 1858 *et seq.*) at 35 Robinson Street and the V.H. Blackington Factory (1869 *et seq.*) at 140 Commonwealth Avenue are important touchstones to The Falls's jewelry-manufacturing history, one of the community's key industries. Jewelry manufacturing was the single most important industry in Attleborough (which divided into Attleborough and North Attleborough in 1887) for most of the 19th and 20th centuries. North Attleborough's jewelry manufacturing was consistently smaller than that in Attleborough, but factories in North Attleborough produced the full range of silver, gold, gold-filled, and gold-plated jewelry.

Both complexes are associated with long-lived jewelry businesses. Each complex, moreover, remained in use as jewelry manufacturing sites for more than a century. The Freeman-Sturdy Factory first housed several iterations of at least two generations of Freeman-led entities active from 1847 to 1913, the longest as B.S. Freeman C^o, manufacturers of gold-plated costume jewelry. J.F. Sturdy's Sons, the second-generation re-organization of company established in the 1840s, continued the manufacture of gold-plated jewelry here until the mid-1950s. A.L. Lindroth, a costume-jewelry manufacturer established in the early twentieth century, moved here from Elm Street in the 1950s and was the last of the single-occupant jewelry manufacturers. On the other hand, V.H. Blackington C^o, which occupied a pre-existing building on the site and replaced it in 1869 with the current building after the first burned, remained the sole tenant here until 1983. The longevity of many of these firms in one location, like that of H.F. Barrows & C^o in the Barrows Building (1906; NR) at 102 South Washington Street, suggests that such is a pattern in North Attleborough.

SOCIAL HISTORY

The Commonwealth Avenue Historic District demonstrates a pattern of living and working that helps to explain 19th- and early 20th-century social history. The organization of workplace and home show an equivocation between mill village and small city that gave The Falls its distinct sense of time and place.

The proximity of home to working place reflects a particularly localized attitude typically found in mill villages. Colonel Obed Robinson's house at the corner of Robinson and Commonwealth was immediately adjacent to his button-manufacturing factory on the Ten Mile

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River. Both Robert Simmons and Edwin Evans, who lived respectively at 188 and 212 Commonwealth Avenue, owned and operated factories around the corner on Robinson Street. Samuel D. Mason's box company⁹ is still located at the intersection of Mount Hope and Chestnut Streets, little more than half a mile west of his house at 204 Commonwealth Avenue. Even in the twentieth century, the Reverend Ebor Eldon Craig, pastor of Central Congregational Church, lived at 172 Commonwealth Avenue, a short walk from the church at 115 Commonwealth Avenue.

The positioning of large houses well back from the street on a major thoroughfare into the center of a community was typical throughout the United States in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. The phenomenon represents a desire on the part of upper-middle-income families to establish a physical presence that reflected their position in the community. Another similar thoroughfare in North Attleborough may be found on South Washington Street in North Attleborough Center.

RECENT TRENDS

Since the early 1950s, the end of the period of significance, the district and its surroundings have experienced decline in several ways. South and west of the district, demolition has claimed properties, especially large houses, similar to those in the district. Most properties in the district have suffered from deferred maintenance. One property has been vinyl sided, and one has lost a full-width front porch. The changes to nominated properties, however, are relatively minor and reversible. Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places could provide inspiration and incentive to return the nominated properties to near-original condition while the opportunity remains practicably feasible.

Archaeological Significance

Since patterns of ancient Native American settlement in North Attleborough are poorly documented, any surviving sites could be significant. While numerous ancient sites have been recorded downstream of the district along the Ten Mile River drainage, many sites lack interpretative

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⁹ Built in 1891 and considerably expanded in 1910, the building was extensively remodeled and covered with artificial siding in the 1990s; it no longer retains adequate integrity for National Register listing.

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information beyond locations. Many other sites have also been destroyed by industrial, urban, and suburban development. Potential sites in the district may enable the opportunity to systematically study site distributions in the Ten Mile River drainage and their cultural and functional variability through time. Ancient Native sites in the district may contain information that defines the role of sites in this area with more densely settled locales between Attleborough Falls and Attleborough Center or other core areas to the south towards Narragansett Bay.

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential to contribute important information relating to the social, cultural, and economic characteristics that typify the district during the periods when Attleborough Falls industrial activity was thriving. The analysis of structural evidence and the contents of occupational related features may contribute further evidence that documents the relationship of proximity of home to working place and ways that the district reflects a particularly localized attitude found in mill villages. Some houses in the district were owned by factory workers and owners, such as Colonel Obed Robinson, who lived at the corner of Robinson Street and Commonwealth Avenue adjacent to his button-making factory on the Ten Mile River. Archaeological evidence at the sites of possible worker housing, including the house at 172 Robinson Street, may contribute important comparative information indicating how the lives of factory workers in the district compared with the lives of factory owners. Architectural and artifactual evidence may exist indicating the extent that factory related work or manufactured goods were present in the home. Similar evidence might also exist indicating the extent that architecture and the occupants of houses were reflective of individual and community status at different stages of district growth.

Archaeological research may also contribute important information relating to three industrial sites in the district. Artifacts, structures, and stratigraphic evidence may document the sequence of development for industrial operations at the V. H. Blackington Factory (1869) at 140 Commonwealth Avenue and the Freeman-Sturdy Factory (ca. 1858) at 35 Robinson Street. Both factories are extant and may contain important information relating to technology and production in the jewelry industry dating from the mid-19th century. Structural evidence and occupational-related features may also survive from the Colonel Obed Robinson buttonworks, reported in local tradition as the first buttonworks in the nation, built just south of his house at 161 Commonwealth Avenue (ca. 1830). Additional documentary research combined with archaeological testing might also document the construction date for the Robinson House, claimed by local tradition as 1806 but indicated as a later date by architectural details. Technological information relating to the early button industry may also survive at the buttonworks factory site.

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(end)

10. GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

On the north side of Commonwealth Avenue from the east lot line of 234 Commonwealth Avenue, thence to the south, east, and north lot lines of 15 Stanley Street, thence west along the north lot lines of the properties fronting on Commonwealth Avenue to the west lot line of 140 Commonwealth Avenue.

VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

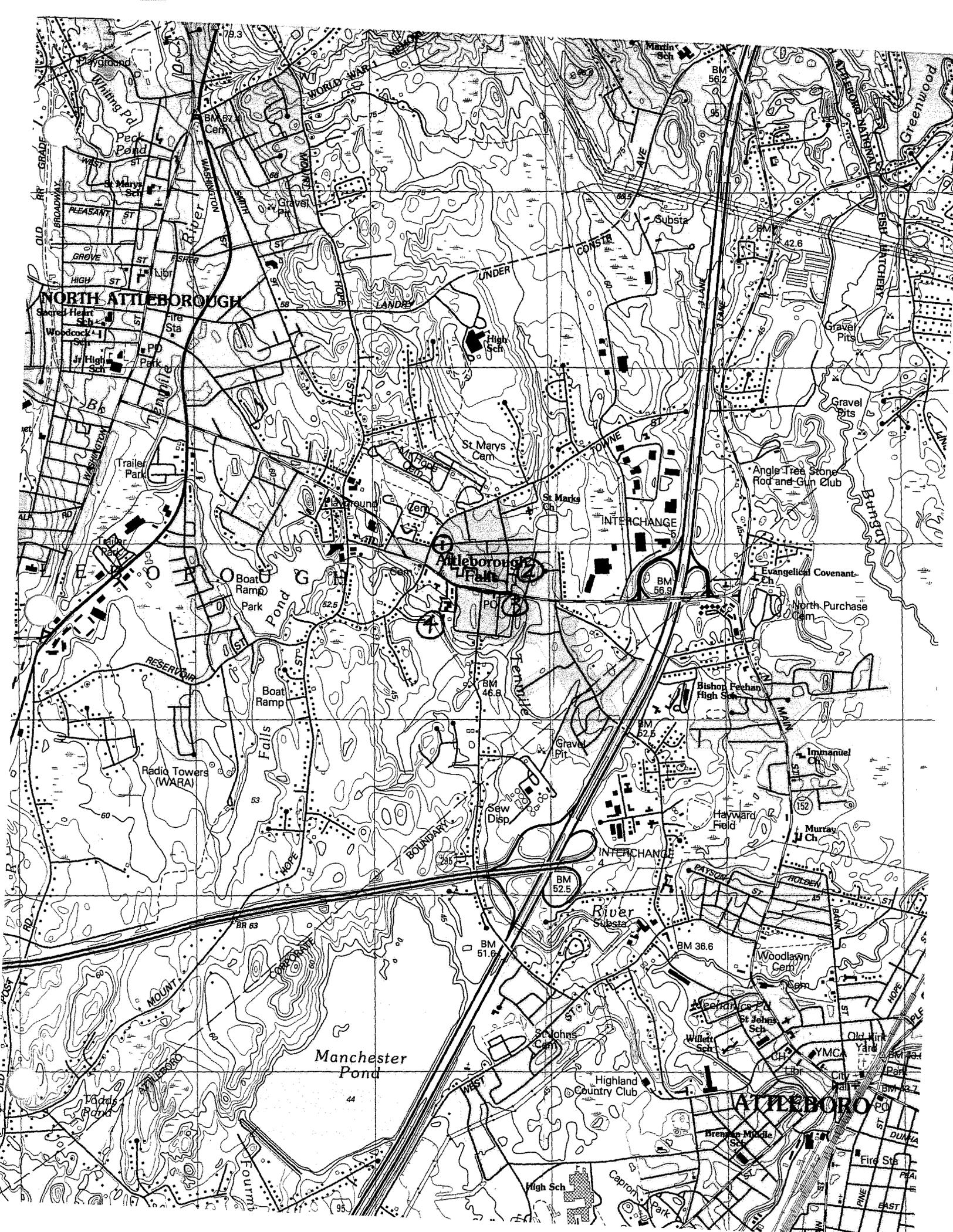
The boundary includes a group of 19th century houses and a 19th century jewelry-manufacturing plant and excludes later properties and open space that lie adjacent to the resource nominated.

(end)

Commonwealth Avenue Historic District

District Data Sheet

Map/Lot	MHC No	Street Address	Name/Function	Date	Style	Status	Resource Type
15/62		140 Commonwealth Ave	V.H Blackinton Factory	1869 <i>et seq.</i>	Industrial Vernacular	B	C
15/126		"	"				
15/127		"	"				
15/103, 64		160 Commonwealth Ave	Cumberland Farms	L20C	Roadside Franchise	B	NC
16/146	105	161 Commonwealth Ave	Col. Obed Robinson House	ca 1830	Federal/Greek Revival	B	C
15/66		172 Commonwealth Ave	House	ca 1800	Federal	B	C
15/67		180 Commonwealth Ave	Semple House	ca 1925	Dutch Colonial	B	C
15/68		188 Commonwealth Ave	Robinson-Simmons House	ca 1825, 1881-82	Federal, Modern Gothic	B	C
15/68		"	Garage	E20C		B	C
18/81		204 Commonwealth Ave	Mason House	1881-82	Modern Gothic	B	C
18/81		"	Garage	M20C		B	C
18/103		212 Commonwealth Ave	Evans House	ca 1890	Queen Anne	B	C
18/103		"	Garage	M20C		B	C
18/6		234 Commonwealth Ave	Sturdy House	ca 1885	Queen Anne	B	C
16/20		3-7 Robinson Street	House	ca 1970	Garrison Colonial	B	NC
16/19		35 Robinson Street	Freeman-Sturdy Factory	Mid-/late 19th C	Vernacular	B	C
18/173		15 Stanley Street	Study Barn	ca 1885	Queen Anne	B	C



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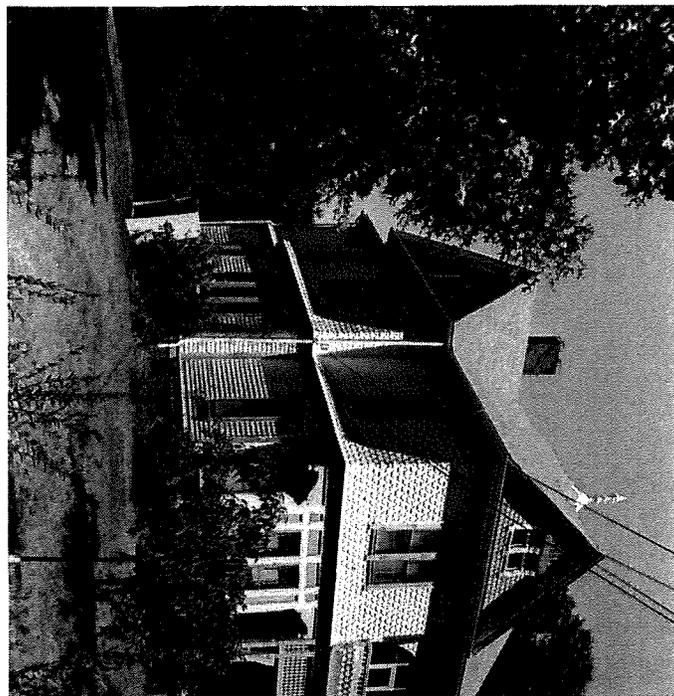
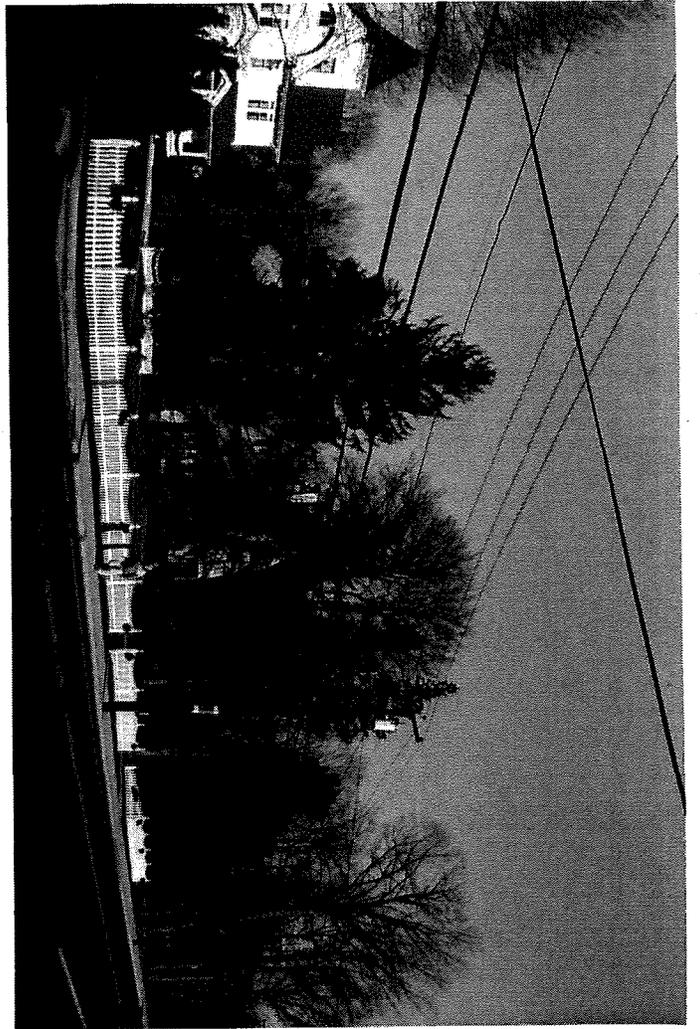
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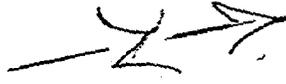
PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Wm. McKenzie Woodward
Date: September 2000
Negatives at North Attleborough Historical Commission

1. Commonwealth Avenue, view to NE from Robinson Street
2. Robinson House, 161 Commonwealth Avenue
3. Sturdy House, 234 Commonwealth Avenue



COMMONWEALTH AVENUE Historic District
NORTH, Attleborough, Massachusetts



Non-contributing

