

## WHERE IS AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS?

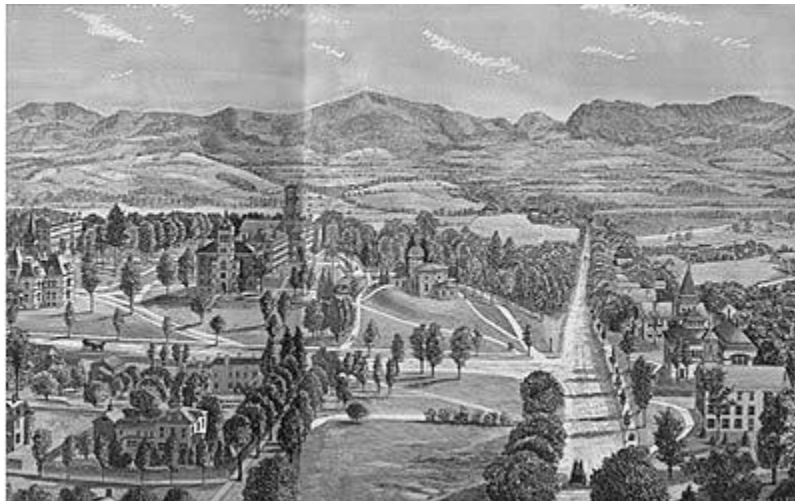
The Town of Amherst was founded in 1759 in Hampshire County of Western Massachusetts. It contains a land area of 27.7 square miles. The University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst College and Hampshire College all reside in Amherst. The total population as of the year 2000 was 34, 874 with 23,570 being UMass students. Amherst is bordered by Hadley to the west, Sunderland and Leverett to the north, Shutesbury, Pelham, and Belchertown to the east, and Granby and South Hadley to the south. It is 23 miles from Springfield, 18 miles from Greenfield, 50 miles from Pittsfield, 87 miles from Boston, and 157 miles from New York City.

## HISTORIES OF THE TOWNS OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Heritage Surveys, Inc. (Land Surveying and Civil Engineering) is building a compilation of historical pictures and sketches of the towns of Western Massachusetts from its archives of ephemera and books. This is a work in progress.



**Massachusetts Agricultural College, to become the University of Massachusetts Amherst**



**View of Amherst College grounds and beyond**

The Town of Amherst was originally known as the Second Precinct of Hadley and by 1735 has begun to enjoy most of the prestige and responsibilities of an independent community. The date 1759 marked her recognition as a "district," with a name of her own. As a district, Amherst was entitled legally to all the privileges of township except that of sending a representative to the General Assembly of the Commonwealth; but under the stress and strain of the Revolutionary War, she was tacitly permitted, even encouraged, to exercise that prerogative as well.

The Stockbridge House on the University of Massachusetts campus, built almost certainly in 1728, is a dignified symbol of her colonial days. In it citizens met to lay plans for a village church, which was duly organized in 1739, with a meeting house on the site of the present Octagon on the Amherst College campus. Amherst was spared most of the perils of Indian warfare. In fact, there is no evidence that Native-Americans ever lived within her borders; they undoubtedly preferred locations nearer the Connecticut River. Amherst does have two small streams, coursing through Factory Hollow and Mill Valley, streams which in early times provided water power for gristmills and sawmills. The little community was at this time largely devoted to farming, but there were two Amherst boys in the class of 1771 at Harvard, an inkling, perhaps, of her academic future.

So far as Amherst herself was involved, the Revolutionary War was neither destructive nor deadly. No Amherst acre was ravaged, no Amherst soldier was killed. the village was torn by bitter dissension, however, due to the fact that many of the most influential citizens were Tories. This spirited division led, throughout the war, to local tension and strife. The Stockbridge House became, briefly, a detention camp for a few outspoken "disloyalists."

By 1820, Amherst was well on her way toward becoming an educational center. Noah Webster was working on his dictionary, and was, moreover, a public-spirited resident. Nearly forty Amherst boys had been away at college: Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Middlebury and Williams. the "little red schoolhouses" were humming with spelling bees. And in 1814 Amherst had opened the first of her several private schools, Amherst Academy. The success and appeal of Amherst Academy were such that in 1821 enlightened citizens, after experiencing innumerable difficulties, launched a more ambitious and enduring educational enterprise, namely, Amherst College.

-Source: The Hampshire History 1662-1962, copyright Hampshire County Commisioners, Northampton, MA , 1964