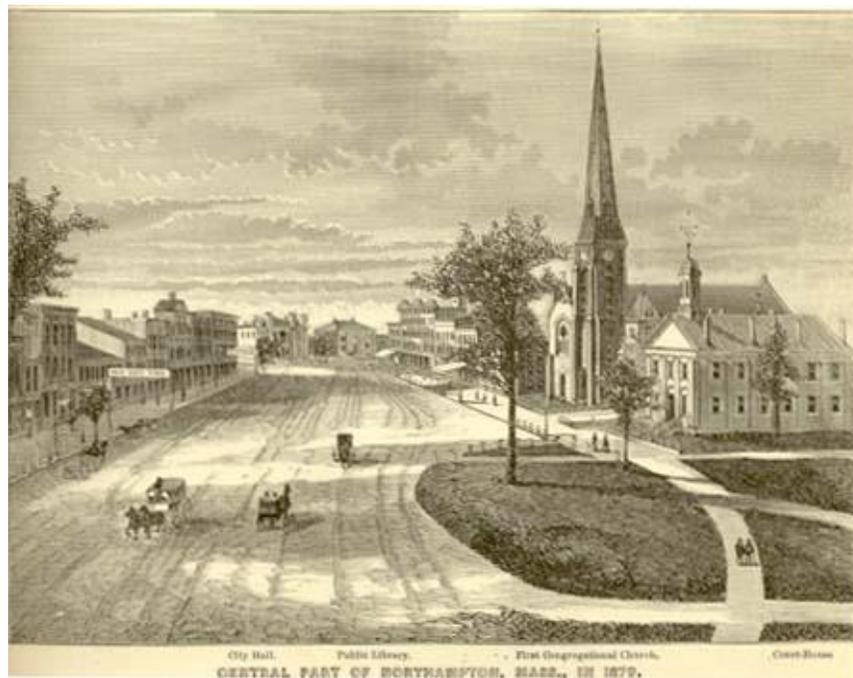


WHERE IS NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS?

Northampton is bordered by Easthampton on the south, Westhampton on the west, Williamsburg and Hatfield on the north and is separated by the Connecticut river from Hadley on the east. Northampton is 43 miles east of Pittsfield; 93 miles west of Boston; and 151 miles north from New York city. Northampton is a lively, diverse community located in the heart of the Five College Area of the Pioneer Valley. Home to Smith College, Northampton also serves as the county seat of Hampshire County. It is located at the intersection of Route 91 (north-south New England corridor) and Route 9 (east-west highway) which links Amherst and the University of Massachusetts with the hilltowns of the west. The downtown of Northampton is alive days and evenings with a wide selection of restaurants, coffee and ice-cream shops, theatres including the only municipally owned theatre in the state, clubs featuring an array of music, street musicians and a Center for the Arts.

HISTORIES OF THE TOWNS OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Heritage Surveys, Inc. 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.



Northampton Main Street – 1879

Witches, Shays Rebellion and Other Early History

Northampton in its early days was a strict New England community. By 1656, witch hysteria had reached this western outpost. One woman, Mary Parsons, was tried twice but acquitted both times. Famed minister Jonathan Edwards, whose stern writings inspired a religious fervor called the "Great Awakening", lived in Northampton for 23 years. In the early 1700s he preached fire and brimstone from his pulpit at the Congregational Church. Ultimately, however, his parishioners became fed up with his scare tactics, harsh judgement of alleged sinners and personal extravagance. They dismissed him.

By 1789, Northampton farmers were struggling in the economic depression that followed the Revolutionary War. Merchants in Eastern Massachusetts, anxious to retire the war debt, pushed land-based taxes through the legislature. Since merchants held little land compared to farmers, these taxes had a much more severe impact on Western Massachusetts. Farmers here relied on barter and were land-rich but cash-poor. Few could pay these new taxes. In such cases, the Articles of Confederation that preceded the U.S. Constitution allowed states to confiscate indebted farms. In protest, on August 29, 1789, Daniel Shays, a land holder from the nearby town of Pelham, mustered 500 of his fellow farmers and marched on the Hampshire County Courthouse. They successfully prevented the Court of Common Pleas from convening to seize property. Shays Rebellion was a well-timed political event. It occurred while Americans were electing delegates to the Constitutional Convention and is considered to have influenced significantly the outcome of the new Constitution.

Source: Northampton Historical Society. Van Vorhis, Jacqueline, The Look of Paradise