

# **Ayer Community-Wide HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY Phase II**

For the  
**Ayer Historical Commission**



*Benjamin F. and Caroline E. Taft House, ca. 1856-1865, 5 Nashua Street (AYE.297)*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this project was to undertake the second phase of a historic resource survey of significant historical and architectural resources located in the town of Ayer with the goal of building a comprehensive survey that encompasses all buildings over 50 years of age. This project identified historic resources that meet the criteria for the inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and to make recommendations for nomination of such properties. This survey also provides recommendations for future survey efforts.

The work built upon survey work undertaken in several stages since 1985. Between 1985 and 1993, four separate inventory efforts by separate entities identified 34 individual buildings, three areas, two objects, and eight bridges. A 2003 Community-Wide Preliminary Historic Resource Survey Plan laid the groundwork for the 2007-2008 Historic Sites Survey, which produced inventory forms for 114 buildings, two burial grounds, and one landscape. Three individual buildings and two historic districts in Ayer are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Included in this survey are 146 primary buildings. Form B – Building inventory forms were prepared for 43 primary buildings and 3 outbuildings. Form A – Area inventory forms were prepared for 4 areas, which included 84 primary buildings, 7 outbuildings, 7 monuments, and 2 structures.

A National Register of Historic Places context was identified in the area of Residential Architecture in Groton Junction during the Early Industrial Period (1830-1870). As a result of the survey, one individual property is recommended as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It is also recommended that one existing historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 be expanded to include a building that was not yet 50 years of age at the time of listing.

This historic sites survey was funded in part by the residents of Ayer through Community Preservation Act funds.

Original survey forms and a copy of this report are housed at the Ayer Library.

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## 1. Methodology

### SURVEY OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to undertake the second phase of a historic resource survey of significant historical and architectural resources located in the town of Ayer with the goal of building a comprehensive survey that encompasses all buildings over 50 years of age. This project identified historic resources that meet the criteria for the inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and to make recommendations for nomination of such properties. This survey also provides recommendations for future survey efforts.

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The project objective was to research and document on standard MHC forms properties identified in the 2003 Plan that were not surveyed in 2007-2008, as well as properties chosen by the Ayer Historical Commission (AHC) for local significance or are at risk of demolition. In the RFQ for this survey, the AHC provided a Preliminary List of approximately 90 properties to be investigated.

The project survey was undertaken in compliance with Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) criteria and methodology. Current standards are MHC's *Historic Properties Survey Manual: Guidelines for the Identification of Historic and Archaeological Resources in Massachusetts* (1992), *Survey Technical Bulletin #1* (1993), *MHC Interim Survey Guidelines* (March 1999, et seq.), and *MHC Interim Guidelines for Inventory Form Photographs* (2009), *MHC Technical Guidelines for Electronic Files in MHC S&P Surveys* (2020), as well as the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Identification (1983).

The *MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report* for Ayer and existing survey forms on file with the MHC provided a preliminary framework and base of information for this analysis. Individual forms and area forms expanded upon information in the *Town Report* and related inventoried properties to the significant themes in the historical development of the town. The survey related cultural resources to historic patterns of cultural development, land use, economic development, social and demographic history, and events that had an impact on the community.

## CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PROPERTIES FOR SURVEY

While the majority of the properties on the Preliminary List are residential, the list included a diversity of building types and uses: a Civil War monument; downtown commercial buildings; a railroad bridge; a dam; a carriage house; a lunch counter converted to a Buddhist center; mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century commercial buildings including a supermarket, shopping center, and a former diner; and, a Fotomat. The proportion of single-family residential buildings to other building types is reflective of the composition of Ayer's historic and present-day built environment. The majority of the properties on the Preliminary List are located along the main thoroughfares in Ayer, *i.e.*, East Main Street, Main Street, West Main Street, Sandy Pond Road, Fitchburg Road, Groton School Road, and Groton-Harvard Road.

Phase I of this project included a reconnaissance survey of Preliminary List properties as well as properties in adjacent areas in order to obtain a sense of property types and styles, architectural integrity, and geographical distribution. Buildings on the Preliminary List that did not retain sufficient architectural integrity were removed from the survey list.

Initial observations:

- Ayer has a well-preserved downtown historic district of multi-story brick or frame buildings along Main Street adjacent to the railroad. The cohesive streetscape reflects rebuilding efforts after an 1872 fire claimed the area. Construction there continued through the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Ayer has a significant number of single-family residential buildings constructed circa 1850-1915 in three large areas: North of Main Street, South of East Main Street and West Main Street. Construction came as a result of the four railroads that intersected here beginning in the 1840s.
- Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century buildings were well-represented on the Preliminary List. Ayer's proximity to Fort Devens and the presence of Route 2A resulted in construction of one-story retail shopping centers, restaurants, and supermarkets during the 1940s-1960s.
- A small number of former farm dwellings outside of the downtown area, constructed during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, were included on the Preliminary List.
- Vacation cottages near Sandy Pond, constructed in the 1910s-1930s, were included in the Preliminary List.

- Some buildings were included on the Preliminary List as a result of the 2003 Historic Resource Plan recommendations. In the intervening years, some of these buildings had been substantially altered or demolished and were removed from the Preliminary List during Phase 2.
- Few outbuildings such as barns and shops are present alongside many of the properties. Where present, these associated buildings were documented in relation to the primary dwellings.

**The following criteria for selecting properties for survey were proposed:**

- Inclusion on the Preliminary List;
- At risk through tear-down, subdivision, or advanced deterioration and more than 50 years of age;
- Architectural quality and integrity: Higher rather than lower, given the extent of other inventoried properties; Strength and clarity of visual character are important factors;
- Historical Merit: Resources associated with themes or events that represent patterns in local history;
- Shared history and grouping: Specifically for potential small areas;
- Contribution to the streetscape: Visibility, prominence, relation to nearby properties that may better demonstrate historical or architectural themes as a group than as individual properties;
- Visibility from the public way and physical presence in Ayer.

## **PROCEDURES AND PRODUCTS**

The Survey followed the basic procedures as all inventory work: field survey; research; evaluation; and, production of inventory forms.

In Phase I, preliminary work encompassed a reconnaissance survey of the types and geographical distribution of cultural resources in areas presented in, and adjacent to, the Preliminary List, site observation of all of the Preliminary List properties visible from the public way, and an overview of documentary research with which to establish a context for analyzing Preliminary List properties. Criteria for selecting and removing properties from the Preliminary List were developed and finalized in collaboration with the AHC and MHC. Potential additional properties were suggested as a result of field reconnaissance. A base map to be prepared by the town's department of public works was selected; the map features lot lines and building footprints.

In Phase II, architectural assessments and documentary research were continued, agreed-upon selection criteria were applied to the Preliminary List, and a final list of specific properties to be surveyed in this project was developed in collaboration with the AHC and the MHC. Draft inventory forms for different property types were produced for review and comment by the AHC and the MHC.

In Phase III, inventory forms were prepared for all agreed-upon properties, potential National Register contexts were identified, and National Register criteria were applied to all inventoried resources. The survey record consisted of standard MHC Forms A and B and include each property selected for inclusion in the inventory.

Research sources included town directories, historic atlases, town histories, and MACRIS (the MHC database of historic resources). The collections of the Local History Room of the Ayer Library were consulted. When merited and where possible, state and federal censuses and vital records such as birth and death records were consulted via web-based resources such as Ancestry.com. Secondary source information was also accessed through web-based research and archive sites such as Archive.org and HathiTrust Digital Library. Deed research was undertaken strategically.

In Phase 4, inventory forms were finalized and numbered according to MHC requirements, National Register Criteria Statements were finalized, and a final base map and street index of all inventoried properties was prepared.

## 2. Inventoried Properties

Street #	Street Name	Building Name	MHC ID	Area	Property ID
		Main Street Area	AYE.A	Main Street Area	
		Caza Manor Area	AYE.J	Caza Manor Area	
		Lawton Street Area	AYE.K	Lawton Street Area	
		Sandy Pond Area	AYE.L	Sandy Pond Area	
3	Calvin St.		AYE.252	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000370
3R	Calvin St.	Warren P. Holden Camp	AYE.253	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000330
5	Calvin St.	Sanford B. Preble Cottage	AYE.254	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000340
6	Calvin St.	Daniel W. Fletcher House	AYE.255	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000400
7	Calvin St.	Pillman Cottage	AYE.256	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000320
7 1/2	Calvin St.		AYE.257	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000300
8	Calvin St.		AYE.258	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000390
9	Calvin St.	Preble Cottage	AYE.259	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000310
10	Calvin St.		AYE.260	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000380
11	Calvin St.	Dandor Cottage	AYE.261	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000690
11	Calvin St.	Dandor Cottage	AYE.262	Sandy Pond Area	
51	Cambridge St.	Temple Anshey Sholom	AYE.263		190270000000430
14	Central Ave.	Hardy's Block	AYE.264		190260000002780
28	Coolidge Rd.	George J. and Clara Burns Carriage House	AYE.265		190190000001700
1	Columbia St.	U.S. Post Office - Ayer Main Branch	AYE.12	Main Street	190260000002790
7	Depot Square	Carlin's Building	AYE.365	Main Street	190260000003290
4	East Main St.	Charles E. Kennison House	AYE.266		190260000002820
6	East Main St.	O.F. Slocumb Bicycle Repair Shop	AYE.267		190260000002830
11	East Main St.	Rev. John M. and Lucy Chick House	AYE.268		190260000003250
44	East Main St.	George H. Woods House	AYE.269		190270000001190
94	East Main St.	Lydia and Pembroke S. Rich House / Caza Manor Motel	AYE.270	Caza Manor Area	190340000000710



<b>Street #</b>	<b>Street Name</b>	<b>Building Name</b>	<b>MHC ID</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Property ID</b>
94	East Main St.	Caza Manor Motel Sign	AYE.925	Caza Manor Area	190340000000710
8	Edgeway	Edward A. and Clara Richardson House	AYE.325	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000190
22	Fitchburg Rd.	Tom's Food World	AYE.277		190180000000020
111	Fitchburg Rd.	Camp Stevens Lunch Counter and Motor Cabins	AYE.7		190010000000020
29	Groton-Harvard Rd.	Leon and Rose Flint House	AYE.278		190270000000720
51-53	Groton-Harvard Rd.		AYE.279		190200000000030
51-53	Groton-Harvard Rd.	Barn	AYE.280		190200000000030
71	Groton School Rd.		AYE.281		190120000000100
35	Grove St.	Charles E. Dodge House	AYE.282		190340000000110
2	Hedgeway	Clifford and Margaret McNulty House	AYE.326	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000170
3	Hedgeway	Oscar and Ina Bolton House	AYE.327	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000090
5	Hedgeway		AYE.328	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000080
6	Hedgeway	Mary B. Nutting House	AYE.329	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000010
9	Lawton St.	Rector T. and Martha Bartlett House	AYE.283	Lawton Street Area	190260000001490
10	Lawton St.	Frederick A. and Jane A. B. Pelton House	AYE.80	Lawton Street Area	190260000001330
14	Lawton St.		AYE.284	Lawton Street Area	190260013200010
14	Lawton St.		AYE.284	Lawton Street Area	190260013200020
15	Lawton St.		AYE.285	Lawton Street Area	190260000001450
16	Lawton St.	Kate A. and John Remick House	AYE.286	Lawton Street Area	190260000001310
17	Lawton St.	Thomas and Susannah Johnson House	AYE.287	Lawton Street Area	190260000001430
18	Lawton St.	Maria Keyes House	AYE.288	Lawton Street Area	190260000001290
19	Lawton St.	Emma Parker House	AYE.289	Lawton Street Area	190260000001380
20	Lawton St.		AYE.290	Lawton Street Area	190260000001270

Street #	Street Name	Building Name	MHC ID	Area?	Property ID
2	Ledgeway / Wright Rd.		AYE.240	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000230
3	Ledgeway / Wright Rd.		AYE.241	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000210
5	Ledgeway		AYE.330	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000220
2	Littleton Rd.	Hanson Tourist Camp	AYE.291		190350000000070
131	Littleton Rd.	Shirley Upholstery Shop	AYE.292		190370000000060
139	Littleton Rd.	Calvary Baptist Church	AYE.293		190370000000090
139	Littleton Rd.	Calvary Baptist Church Parsonage	AYE.294		190370000000090
1	Main St.	Ayer Town Hall	AYE.13	Main Street	190260000002310
1	Main St.	Women's Christian Temperance Union Fountain	AYE.917	Main Street	190260000002310
1	Main St.	War Memorial	AYE.918	Main Street	190260000002310
1	Main St.	Civil War Memorial	AYE.919	Main Street	190260000002310
1	Main St.	War Memorial	AYE.920	Main Street	190260000002310
1	Main St.	War Memorial	AYE.921	Main Street	190260000002310
1	Main St.	World War II Memorial	AYE.922	Main Street	190260000002310
1	Main St.	Korea and Vietnam Wars Memorial	AYE.923	Main Street	190260000002310
	Main St.	Pedestrian Subway Entrance Shelter	AYE. 924	Main Street	
3	Main St.	North Middlesex Savings Bank	AYE.14	Main Street	190260000002300
9	Main St.	Mead's Block	AYE.15	Main Street	190260000002280
12	Main St.		AYE.32	Main Street	190260000000940
15	Main St.	Felch-Carley Building	AYE.16	Main Street	190260000002250
18	Main St.	Cottage Snack Shop	AYE.31	Main Street	190260000000930
21	Main St.	First National Supermarket	AYE.17	Main Street	190260000002240
25	Main St.	Spaulding Building	AYE.18	Main Street	190260000002230
26	Main St.		AYE.30	Main Street	190260000000920
30	Main St.	Phelps Carley Building	AYE.29	Main Street	190260000000910
31	Main St.	Page's Block	AYE.19	Main Street	190260000001870
48	Main St.	John J. Barry Building	AYE.28	Main Street	190260000000890
49	Main St.	Nutting Building	AYE.20	Main Street	190260000001600
59	Main St.	Public Spirit Building	AYE.21	Main Street	190260000001580

<b>Street #</b>	<b>Street Name</b>	<b>Building Name</b>	<b>MHC ID</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Property ID</b>
67	Main St.	P.N. Laggis store	AYE.23	Main Street	190260000001210
17	Maple St.	Clarence A. M. and Beatrice Childs House	AYE.295		190340000001170
6	Mountain View Ave.		AYE.331	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000140
7	Mountain View Ave.		AYE.332	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000090
8	Mountain View Ave.		AYE.333	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000120
1	Nashua St.	Phebe and E. Dana Bancroft House	AYE.296		190260000002490
5	Nashua St.	Benjamin F. and Caroline E. Taft house	AYE.297		190260000002470
8	Nashua St.	Susan and Sadie Tuten house	AYE.298		190260000001970
6	Old Sandy Pond Rd.		AYE.334	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000170
12	Old Sandy Pond Rd.		AYE.335	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000040
12-14	Page St.	Caza Manor Tourist Cabins	AYE.271	Caza Manor Area	190270000001360
12-14	Page St.	Caza Manor Tourist Cabins	AYE.272	Caza Manor Area	190270000001360
12-14	Page St.	Caza Manor Tourist Cabins	AYE.273	Caza Manor Area	190270000001360
12-14	Page St.	Caza Manor Tourist Cabins	AYE.274	Caza Manor Area	190270000001360
12-14	Page St.	Caza Manor Tourist Cabins	AYE.275	Caza Manor Area	190270000001360
12-14	Page St.	Caza Manor Tourist Cabins	AYE.276	Caza Manor Area	190270000001360
3-5	Park St.	Spencer Stone Cutting Shop / Ayer Monument Works	AYE.299		190260000001050
106	Park St.	Tertulliano "Jimmy" and Filomena Pirone House	AYE.300		190190000000080
9	Pearl St.		AYE.301	Lawton Street Area	190260000001300
25	Pearl St.	Abel L. and Sarah Lawton House	AYE.302		190260000001220
26	Pearl St.	George and Ruella Raymond House	AYE.303		190190000000530

<b>Street #</b>	<b>Street Name</b>	<b>Building Name</b>	<b>MHC ID</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Property ID</b>
27	Pearl St.	Charles R. and Mary Flagg House	AYE.304		190190000000830
66	Pearl St.	Levi W. Phelps House	AYE.305		190190000000330
1	Pierce Ave.	Mabelle Pickard Harlow Cottage	AYE.336	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000240
36	Pleasant St.	Martha Waters Mason and Charles W. Mason House	AYE.306	Lawton Street Area	190260000001470
49	Pleasant St.	Pierson Kendall House	AYE.307		190260000001610
0	Sandy Pond Rd.	Sandy Pond Recreation Building	AYE.337	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000200
140	Sandy Pond Rd.	Kuzmich and Kowalchuk Workshop	AYE.308		190230000000050
144	Sandy Pond Rd.	Thomas and Lizzie Steeves House	AYE.309		190230000000080
2	Sandy Way		AYE.338	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000420
11	Scully Rd.	Calvary Baptist Church	AYE.310		190320000000440
17	Scully Rd.	Daniel and Mary Scully House	AYE.311		190320000000460
3	Sedgeway		AYE.339	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000250
5	Shirley St.	James Brenhan House	AYE.312		190260000000780
9	Shirley St.	Patrick McMahon House	AYE.313		190260000000770
20	Shirley St.	Groton School No. 12	AYE.314		190260000000540
0	Snake Hill Rd./ 2 Calvin St		AYE.340	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000420
203	Snake Hill Rd.		AYE.341	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000170
206	Snake Hill Rd.		AYE.342	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000180
210	Snake Hill Rd.	"Shady Cottage," Taft Cottage	AYE.343	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000020
212	Snake Hill Rd.		AYE.344	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000140
222	Snake Hill Rd.	Edward A. Richardson Cottage	AYE.345	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000280
224	Snake Hill Rd.	Lawrence Cottage	AYE.346	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000270
226	Snake Hill Rd.	Richardson Cottage	AYE.347	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000260
228	Snake Hill Rd.	Boutelle Cottage	AYE.348	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000250
230	Snake Hill Rd.		AYE.349	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000220
237	Snake Hill Rd.	Tristram Goding House	AYE.350	Sandy Pond Area	190210000000080
4	Standish Ave.		AYE.351	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000470

Street #	Street Name	Building Name	MHC ID	Area	Property ID
5	Standish Ave.	Frank S. Pierce House	AYE.352	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000450
5	Standish Ave.	Frank S. Pierce Garage	AYE.353	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000450
8	Standish Ave.	Edna and Henry Zoller Cottage	AYE.354	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000460
1	Wachusett Ave. East		AYE.355	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000530
3	Wachusett Ave. East		AYE.242	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000510
5	Wachusett Ave. East	Kilbourn Cottage	AYE.356	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000500
6	Wachusett Ave. East		AYE.357	Sandy Pond Area	190220000000030
7	Wachusett Ave. East	Kilbourn Cottage	AYE.358	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000490
54	Washington St.	Sarah M. Davis House	AYE.315		190190000001420
83	Washington St.	George J. and Clara Burns House	AYE.316		190190000001690
83	Washington St.	Burns Garage	AYE.317		190190000001690
50	West Main St.	Federation House / Y.M.C.A. Recreation Center	AYE.318		190260000000750
88	West Main St.	Suffrage Coffee House	AYE.319		190260000000640
210	West Main St.	Devens Shopping Center	AYE.320		190320000000300
210	West Main St.	Fotomat	AYE.321		190320000000300
211	West Main St.		AYE.322		190320000000130
17	Westford Rd.	Hazard House	AYE.323		190160000000150
22	Westford Rd.	Pierce House	AYE.324		190160000000100
1	Wright Rd.		AYE.359	Sandy Pond Area	190140000000090
6	Wright Rd.		AYE.239	Sandy Pond Area	190140000000080
51	Wright Rd.		AYE.360	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000480
53	Wright Rd.		AYE.361	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000520
57	Wright Rd.		AYE.362	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000550
1	Wright Way	Cleo B. and J. Edward Holmes Cottage	AYE.363	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000330
3	Wright Way	Henry E. and N. Emma Sanderson House	AYE.364	Sandy Pond Area	190150000000340

### **3. National Register of Historic Places Eligibility Recommendations**

#### **A. Historic Context: *Residential Architecture in Groton Junction during the Early Industrial Period (1830-1870)***

Prior to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Groton Junction (present-day downtown Ayer) was agricultural land distant from the town centers of Groton and Harvard, Massachusetts. With the arrival in the 1840s of four intersecting railroads through this area, this outlying area became Groton Junction. Groton Junction experienced rapid construction with a commercial area along Main Street and residential construction in the uplands north of Main Street. This first wave of residential construction in response to the railroads was modest 1½-story, side-hall plan, gable-front houses. These clapboard-clad houses typically feature a mix of Greek Revival detailing such as corner pilasters, wide friezes and gable-end cornice returns with Italianate decorative brackets at the entrance.

#### **B. Properties Recommended for Listing on the National Register of Historic Places**

One individual building is recommended as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

- 5 Nashua Street: Benjamin F. and Caroline E. Taft House, AYE.297

The Benjamin F. Taft and Caroline E. Taft House is an excellent representative example of residential architecture constructed in Groton Junction in response to the arrival of the railroads. The gable-front building's modest size, Greek Revival and Italianate styling, and frame construction are an excellent example of these styles. The building retains a very high level of architectural integrity and is in excellent condition. The building is recommended as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as a physical example of the town's rapid expansion in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is also recommended that one existing historic district be expanded with the inclusion of the Ayer Post Office (AYE.12)

- Main Street Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 NRDIS 3/16/1989.

It appears that the post office was not included in the historic district solely due to its age; the building was less than 50 years of age at the time of nomination. The Ayer Post Office is a representative example of Colonial Revival post office design of its time, retains a high level of integrity, and contributes to the streetscape.

#### 4. Recommendations for Further Survey

106	Central Avenue	
108	Central Avenue	
110	Central Avenue	
112	Central Avenue	
116	Central Avenue	
120	Central Avenue	
122	Central Avenue	
128	Central Avenue	
13	East Main Street	Mid-19th C house with attached barn
6	Jackson Street	Jackson Street Area
8	Jackson Street	Jackson Street Area
10	Jackson Street	Jackson Street Area
12	Jackson Street	Jackson Street Area
21	Maple Street	
1	Moore Drive	Unaltered example of Post-World War II Minimal Traditional Cape
59	Sandy Pond Road	
115	Washington Street	Page Hilltop School (1956) Typical mid-20th C school

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